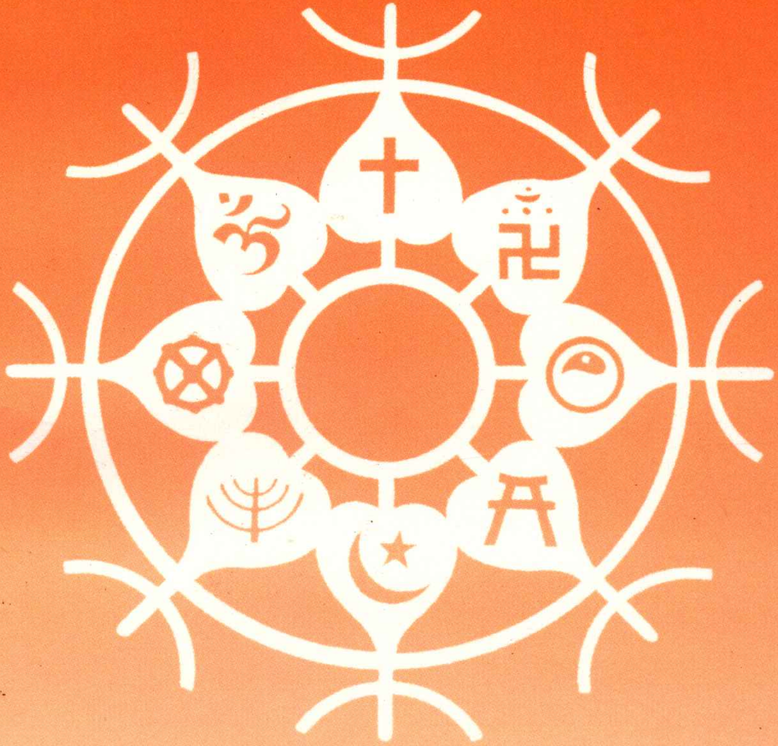
JOURNAL OF
DHARMA



PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

April-June 2005 Vol. 30, No. 2

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

An International Quarterly of World Religions

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief Editor: Saju Chackalackal, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, P.O. Dharmaram College, 560 029 Bangalore, India. Tel: +91-80-41116219; 6111(office). Web: www.chackalackal.com; E-mail: editor@journalofdharma.com; saju@chackalackal.com

Associate Editors: Augustine Thottakara, *CSWR, Bangalore*; J. G. Arapura, *McMaster*, *Hamilton*, *Canada*; Thomas Aykara, *CSR*, *Pariyaram*, J. B. Chethimattam, *Nagarcoil*; Thomas Kadankavil, *Kottayam*; Thomas Kalam, *Bangalore*; Antony Kalliath, *Coimbatore*; Thomas Manickam, *South Africa*; Thomas Manninezhath, *Namibia*; Kuncheria Pathil, *DVK*, *Bangalore*; Joseph Pathrapankal, *DVK*, *Bangalore*; William Sweet, *St. Francis Xavier University*, *Nova Scotia*. Kurian Kachappilly, *DVK*, *Bangalore*; Angela Wong Wai Ching, *Chinese University of Hong Kong*, *Hong Kong*.

Board of Consultants: Amaladoss, *Vidya Jyothi, Delhi*; J. P. Clayton, *Boston University*, *USA*; John Bowker, *Cambridge*, *UK*; Jung Young Lee, *Drew University*, *New Jersey*; Jyothi Sahi, *Bangalore*; G. J. Larson, *University of Indiana*, *USA*; Thomas Mampra, *Trivandrum*; J. Masson, *Belgium*; A. Nambiaprambil, *Upasana*, *Thodupuzha*; Oberhammer, *Vienna*; R. C. Pandey, *New Delhi*; Thomas Kochumuttom, *Risikesh*; Mathias Mundadan, *Jeevass*, *Aluva*; G. C. Nayak, *Bhubaneswar*; Raimundo Panikkar, *Barcelona*, *Spain*.

Book Review Editors: J. B. Chethimattam, Mathias Mundadan and V. Venkatakrishna.

Executive Secretary: Jaison Mundanchirayil, DVK.

Journal of Dharma is a scholarly research publication of inter-religious studies on live issues of religion, philosophy and theology. While the Editors recognize the need for free expression of differing opinions by our collaborators and contributors within the natural limits of academic freedom and responsibility, they do not necessarily subscribe to their views.

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

April-June 2005 Vol. 30, No. 2

PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
DVK, Dharmaram College
560 029 Bangalore, India
Tel. +91-80-4111 6111; Fax: +91-80-4111 6000
E-Mail: info@journalofdharma.com
Website: www.journalofdharma.com

CONTENT

Editorial: Psychology of Religion 147
Saju Chackalackal

1. Assault on Religion from Modern Behavioural and Natural Sciences.. 157
Jose Thadavanal

2. Could We Imagine a Religion for Private Use.................................... 185
Jose Nandhikkara

3. Spiritual Wellbeing of Young Female Adults.................................... 205
Elizabeth C. S.

4. The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism.................................. 225
Antony Puthenangady

5. Religious Belonging and Identity among South African Hindu Women 233
Maheshvari Naidu

6. An Iranian Cultural Approach to Manichaean Gnosticism 247
Abolqasem Esmailpour

7. Role of Religion towards Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria 261
J. A. Onimhawo

8. Adam: A Psychological Reading of the Myth of Man-Making 271
Ignatius Jesudasan

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 147-156

Editorial

PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Most human beings on the face of the earth are – either by nature or by nurture – religious, though they would differ from each other in many particular aspects. Many among them are passionately committed to a 'divine' centre of life, and are ultimately concerned with designing a life in accordance with its dynamics. It is true that religion is an all encompassing phenomenon in the life of any human being who is seriously religious. In fact, no sector of life could be compartmentalised or marked out as unaffected or uninfluenced by religion. In other words, religious reality is that which permeates the entire life of a person, and it could be identified beneath the motives, feelings, behaviour patterns, and value orientations of religious adherents, covering the entire gamut of human existence, activities, and the continued becoming processes. Elements that constitute the religious reality generally include, (i) a drive on the part of an individual person to cultivate a transcendental dimension of life in relation to a reality that transcends the bounds of sense, (ii) a transformative experience of that reality, which is christened as religious experience, (iii) an articulate credo, if belonging to a community of believers or an organised pattern of religion, (iv) a value system that marks the characteristic behaviours infused with moral sensitivity, (v) a set of rituals to celebrate and relive the religious experience on a daily basis, and (vi) a sense of awe, commitment, and ecstasy that pervades and transforms the entire life, leading to a balanced or integrated life – both at the personal and communitarian levels.

Religion, for many, is exclusively a spiritual reality, which is capable of animating various dimensions of human life, both at the personal and societal life. This aspect of religion does not easily lend itself to any experiment or laboratory analysis. Without denying this fact, many others consider the same religion as having a dimension which is empirical, and hence observable and measurable with scientific tools and methods. Over the last one hundred years this latter has been brought to the fore a vibrant and positively contributing discipline called Psychology of Religion. The business of psychology of religion is to analyse the religious consciousness and the data connected with religious experiences, and to suggest possible enhancements with a view to bring about holistic human existence. Of course, those scientists involved in giving shape and perfection to such a science had no identical motives. While some psychologists of religion involved in researches to promote or defend religion, either in *toto* or in some form of it, as it existed in their contemporary society, many others had a genuine aspiration to purify and transform a particular religious tradition, or one or the other practice within it, with a hope to recover its original holistic spirit or to reshape it in accordance with modern understanding and improved sensibilities. Moreover, there were still others who "seek to discredit religion, in whole or in part, either by finding its origins in natural, sometimes pathological, processes or by demonstrating that it can have serious negative consequences, both personal and social."[1]

Contrary opinions and conclusions have been found to co-exist even among the stalwarts of psychology of religion. Sigmund Freud, for example, held that religion – a dangerous illusion[2] that restricts the great majority of human beings to an immature phase of development – is rooted in the wishes and fears of early childhood, leading to a belief in a Father God and the scrupulous fulfilment of a set of fixed rituals. C. G. Jung's analytic psychology, on the contrary, maintained that religion – an essential psychological function[3] – symbolises a deeper dimension of human existence, a vital layer of the psyche, recognition and integration of which are said to facilitate a harmonious and balanced human life. While the former proposed an allegiance to and practice of religion to be the cause of neurosis, the latter thought it to be the contrary: Jung argued that it is the neglect of religion which would lead individuals into neurotic behaviour patterns, adversely affecting even the human species as a whole. The contemporary scenes continue to witness contrary positions among psychologists as far as the religious reality is concerned. However, lack of a unified goal among psychologists has contributed towards a more holistic and thorough analysis of the religious reality, paving the way for an enhanced understanding of the same in the recent past.

---

[1] *Encyclopaedia of Psychology*, 2000 edition, s.v. "Religion and Psychology" by David M. Wulff, vol. 7, 34.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. & ed. James Strachey, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1961, 55; see also 38-43, 62, 66-71.

[3] Carl G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire, 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, vol. 11, 97.

Despite the contributions made by psychology of religion, the relationship between professional psychologists and the proponents of religion has often been fought with controversies. While "psychology has accused religion of everything from dogmatism and intolerance to social repression and mental illness," religion has blamed psychology of "arrogance, elitism, amorality, and selfishness. Regardless of their accuracy, these accusations point to the rift between psychological and religious disciplines."[4]

The central focus of psychology of religion, to my mind, should be balanced, integrated, and religiously oriented human persons. This calls for an open, tolerant, and constructive approach towards the religious reality. That is, the idealised result of any true and healthy religion – as projected by psychology of religion – should pervade the inner recesses of human life and influence the ethos of an entire people, and an era or civilisation; moreover, it should result in an integration or wholeness both at the personal and societal levels, requiring not merely a random lapse and an occasional act, but a healthy and habitual pattern of transformed life designed after the unique vision of religion to which one is committed. It must be borne in mind that this thrust on integration, in most of the cases, does not point to a realised state or achieved plateau, but most to an ongoing process, which has to continue and converge in the life of the individual and community.

Religious orientations or affinities among individuals have been instrumental in infusing them with a sense of meaning, transformed life patterns, and a readiness to integrate all dimensions of life without any loss of orientation. Religions, for example, seem to be having a deep appreciation even for the otherwise unappreciated dimension of life in the painful experiences and catastrophic situations within the human conditions. As Pargament puts it, "that religion is closely tied to pivotal periods in life should not be particularly startling. Hardships, suffering, and conflicts have been centres of concern for the major religions of the world. Each, in its own way, acknowledges the fact that life can be perilous."[5] The attempt to integrate the seemingly opposite, unpleasant, and painful elements of human existence, therefore, is envisioned to enable those who are religious to formulate and practise their life vision on how to positively and creatively respond to those conditions.

---

[4] Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*, New York: The Guilford Press, 1997, 7.

One difficulty with this situation is the fact of the subjective dimension of religious experience, and the impossibility of objectively verifying its real character. Granted that many people are just what they seem, some prove far more religious than they appear, and some others prove far less religious than they claim. That is, the religious motive is lying far beneath the external dynamics, and it is hard even for the science of psychology of religion to screen the same with objectively verifiable criteria. There are also some who claim to have no religious affinity, and others who declare to be belonging to no institutional religion; many of them, however, acknowledge true religious perspectives and feeling, but mostly on the private domains, or on the personal dimensions of life, which cannot be objectified and verified.

Gordon W. Allport, a pioneer in the field of psychology of religion, has offered two ideal types of religious orientation. First is the extrinsic religious orientation that projects a negative attitude and a preoccupation to manipulate and use the religious reality for ulterior motives: "A person with an extrinsic religious orientation is using his religious views to provide security, comfort, status, or social support for himself – religion is not a value in its own right, it serves other needs, and it is a purely utilitarian formation. Now prejudice too is a 'useful' formation: it too provides security, comfort, status, and social support. A life that is dependent on the support of extrinsic religion is likely to be dependent on the supports of prejudice…"[6] The second, intrinsic religious orientation, regards faith as a supreme value in its own right, without giving primacy to the formal structures of religion: "… the intrinsic religious orientation is not an instrumental device. It is not a mere mode of conformity, nor a crutch, nor a tranquilizer, nor a bid for status. All needs are subordinated to an overarching religious commitment… In such a life (where religion is an intrinsic and dominant value), there is no place for rejection, contempt, or condescension toward one's fellowmen."[7] Although there are both types of orientations found among the adherents of different religions, or one or the other at different periods in the life of an individual adherent, realization of the religious reality would be positively enhanced only in the intrinsic one. The source of an "overarching religious commitment" that Allport refers to, can be located in what Rudolf Otto calls a "creature-consciousness," or a "creature feeling," which is identified as a response to the numinous found in religion. According to Otto, "it is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."[8] A person who is enabled by religion to understand not only his/her own strengths, but also the basic insufficiency, or the "nothingness" of his/her being in the presence of that being – "the numinous" or the "*mysterium tremendum*" – is made intensely aware of a religious possibility of filling the ontological vacuum by drawing on that ultimate source or being. It is the centrality of this non-rational experience of "the holy" or the "wholly other" that finally turns out to be the cornerstone of the intrinsic orientation of religiosity. Its essential bipolar nature, which is at the same time "frighteningly awesome and overpowering" and "alluring and fascinating,"[9] that generates an all-enveloping commitment in those who experience the religious reality.

---

[5] Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping*, 3.

[6] G. W. Allport and J. M. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967), 441.

History is the witness to many persons whose lives have been radically transformed by the intrinsic religious motives. Although most of such persons have not been recognised by and large – as they turn out to be the ordinary in our ordinary religious sphere – we can identify some of the stalwarts in almost all religions. A powerful image, accepted both by the religious communities and secular groups, acknowledged by people of almost all faiths, and acclaimed by rich and poor alike, is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She is a symbol of the immense possibilities that could come forth from an intrinsic religious orientation: although a frail and lone lady as she was, placed in an unfamiliar culture and ethos, with meagre or non-existing material resources, surrounded by abject poverty and irredeemable situations of the people, Mother Teresa set out to do the impossible. The only strength or source that was at her disposal was her faith in the person of Jesus Christ. It was this source that finally turned out to be her unceasing inspiration to leap into the abysmal poverty and painful desertions that her *neighbouring* people had been experiencing and to reach out to them as a powerful beacon to all who came in contact with her. Her psyche was radically transformed by the faith in Jesus; in fact, she was not that frail and lone lady who had reached the shores of India: she could withstand all the odds that came on her way, and plunge into many vicissitudes of life through the strength of a new religious consciousness that was infused with a set of new values arrived at through a Christian perspective. Later, what had begun as her personal ministry, finally, turned out to be an effective network to save and serve a lot of forsaken people. She could single-handedly manage its affairs with efficiency and meaning, but without losing its humane face and foundational religiosity. Thus, the Christian faith for Mother Teresa was not merely an abstract system of dogmatic beliefs, meaningless rituals, and uninteresting symbols, but an existential reality that pervaded her entire body, mind, and soul, making her feelings and relationships as vibrant as she could, transforming not only her personal life, but of many others whom she had reached out through her acts of life and love.

---

[7] Allport and Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," 441.

[8] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tans. John W. Harvey, 2nd edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1950, 10.

[9] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 35.

Of course, on the positive side, religion is one of the most effective and creative motivating mechanisms. However, when it is used to serve the ulterior motives of a vicious psyche, the same religious orientation may turn out to be counterproductive, and detrimental not only to the individual but also to the humanity at large. Whenever the integral vision towards religious reality is threatened, and the extrinsic orientations take control of religious persons and communities, psychological and religious distortions abound, finally making the religion itself a farce and a tool of manipulating human existence and sensitivities. Psychological distortions found to exist in the religious sphere can be far more destructive and dangerous than many other distortions, as religious orientation is so deep and powerfully motivating within the psyche of those who are religious, genuinely or with a fundamentalist bend of mind.

The mental framework of some individuals, who seem to be genuinely religious, at a closer look, reveals some deep-rooted distortions, like self-righteousness or a fundamentalist attitude. Many of these people, however, may not be aware of the distortions involved, as they are either made to believe or brain-washed or indoctrinated that this, in fact, is the only genuine way of being religious. Religious motivation – being a product of orienting human psychic energies in a particular direction due to the perspective that is adopted by an individual or a group – can be equally powerful whether animated by intrinsic or extrinsic orientation. Therefore, even if distorted and far removed from proper religiosity, individuals or groups either with vested interests or with fundamentalist attitudes (both adopting everything to manipulate the power of genuine religiosity) tend to *use* religion. In fact, misusing religion for perpetrating anti-religious causes seems to be commonly shared by many 'adherents' of different religions. A typical case in point is from the contemporary history itself: the claims and counterclaims of Osama bin Laden of Al Quaeda network and George W. Bush of USA and Tony Blair of UK. Referring to the dynamics of their tricky and malicious tendency to call upon religion for justifying whatever claims they make and the enormous number of crimes they commit, either for personal gain or glorification, or for the *cause* of the organisation/nation that they represent, Noam Chomsky puts it succinctly as follows:

> An inauspicious sign is that in both cases the crimes are considered right and just, even noble, within the doctrinal framework of the perpetrators; and in fact are justified in almost the same words. Bin Laden proclaims that violence is justified in self-defense against the infidels who invaded and occupy Muslim lands and against the brutal and corrupt governments they sustain there – words that have considerable resonance in the region even among those who despise and fear him. Bush and Blair proclaim, in almost identical words, that violence is justified to drive evil from our lands. The proclamations of the antagonists are not entirely identical. When bin Laden speaks of "our lands," he is referring to Muslim lands: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, and others... When Bush and Blair speak of "our lands" they are, in contrast, referring to the world. The distinction reflects the power that the adversaries command. That either side can speak without shame of eradicating evil in the light of their records – that should leave us open-mouthed in astonishment, unless we adopt the easy course of effacing even very recent history.[10]

---

[10] Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, 145-146. Power that is commanded by both political figures and religious readers tends to have more or less the same impact,

There is no reason to single out these three figures, except for the international attention and extensive damage done by their policies and actions – whether they objectively qualify for international terrorism or not. There are many other situations, spread across the globe, which tend to be perpetrating the same type of manipulation of religious feelings and sensibilities for the ulterior motives of one or the other: highly tensed situations existing between Israel and Palestine in the Middle East, and between Hindus and Muslims in India, etc., tend to be following similar dynamics or patterns of religious psyche. Emotionally charged individual believers are manipulated to such an extent that they are ready to assume the garb of 'martyrs': the result is the rampant human bombs and suicide squads. Religious belief is deeply rooted in the personality of all such believers so much so that many willingly sacrifice their own lives, come what may. Is there any other urge in the life of ordinary human beings that is so powerful to move them into an altered psyche, and actions that no one would otherwise dare, even to the extent of self-sacrifice and extinction?

These conflicting faces of religious belief and action, seemingly the most powerful motive of the individual and collective psyche, tend to create an alarming situation in the contemporary societies – at the local and international scenes. Indeed, understanding the dynamics of human psyche as far as its religious feelings and influences are concerned is a vital issue that is yet to be mastered by scientists and psychologists. We do still lack proper scientific tools to measure and analyse one of the most promising areas of human behaviour that is motivated by an array of different religious phenomena. Hence, this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* makes an attempt to delve into the inner recesses of Psychology of Religion, with a hope of understanding the religious phenomena from different perspectives, and to reaffirm its effectiveness, if canalised through the proper routes and in the right direction.

---

especially when the political leaders also increasingly tend to call upon their religious affiliations as a vital source of power. Indeed, the ideal situation hopes that power is vested in both these groups for the good of the people (that is, to animate religious adherents or citizens in being and becoming good through right actions), although experience and reality, in most situations, are to the contrary. Chomsky writes in the same work: "It is only in folk-tales, children's stories, and the journals of intellectual opinion that power is used wisely and well to destroy evil. The real world teaches very different lessons, and it takes willful ignorance to fail to perceive them" Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New*, 144.

In the first article, "Assault on Religion from Modern Behavioural and Natural Sciences," Jose Thadavanal, an educational psychologist, makes a critique on the attempts made by atheists and agnostic scientists in making use of new scientific discoveries and their fresh insights and facts to attack and destroy the credibility of religious faith. Highlighting the need of cultivating a positive outlook towards the scientific innovations as possible tools or occasions "to cleanse religions of their deadwood and apparent errors, if any," the author asserts that faith and science are complementary, and not contraries or contradictories, as both of them are genuine partners in the perennial search for truth. This, according to him, calls for a position that "with the passage of time human's understanding of the Divine and other spiritual realities must also evolve and grow; it must be dynamic rather than static."

Jose Nandhikkara, a Wittgensteinein scholar, addresses the question whether there could be a private religion, a religion devoid of language, rituals, priests, and church, or a religion essentially as "a matter between God and the believer only"? He holds that a *private* religion which is totally unintelligible to the other and restricted strictly to subjective experiences "would be so *private* that it is logically impossible for another person to follow." First, he argues negatively that "a radically *private* religion is without content; even the believer cannot practise it; it cannot have objectivity and normativity and, therefore, no use; it is a mere fantasy!" Positively, he argues that "though religion is a matter between God and the believer, it is a joint venture of nature and nurture sustained by God," a fundamental way of being human that essentially requires a passionate commitment.

In "Spiritual Wellbeing of Young Female Adults," Elizabeth C. S. presents a psychologists perspective on religious practices and their positively enhancing results, drawing on her research among college-going youngsters. Her contention is that religion, if practised wholeheartedly, can bring about holistic wellbeing of any person, covering a conglomeration of several human basic dimensions such as psychological, spiritual, social, and physical. Among these, however, the author insists that the spiritual health has a central place, as spirituality – with its basic orientation to an experience of God – provides an overarching umbrella to cover the entire gamut of human reality.

Religious fundamentalism has become one of the most difficult religious attitudes to handle. It has also turned out to be the most dangerous dimension of religion that poses pertinent challenge to the very value of religion. Antony Puthenangady, an expert in clinical psychology, looks into the details of a fundamentalist religious attitude, and opines that "a mixture of religious bigotry and political opportunism" is the real factor that motivates destructive activities initiated by many religious fundamentalists. He rightly concludes that any fundamentalist attitude can be rooted out only in "experiencing of the peace and joy of oneness," which includes also a "self-emptying journey" in the case of all religious believers.

The rest of the entries take up some particular issues related to religion in one or the other tradition. While Maheshvari Naidu makes an analysis of the religious consciousness of Indian settlers in South Africa, with special reference to Hindu women, Esmailpour adopts an Iranian outlook towards Manichaean Gnosticism, and tries to see how they were mutually influential. Onimhawo, in his article "Role of Religion towards Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria," makes a critical examination on the role played by different Nigerian religions in establishing and maintaining peaceful co-existence among people of various religions and denominations. Finally, Ignatius Jesudasan undertakes an attempt to re-interpret the Adam myth from the Old Testament from a psychological perspective, proposing that this myth is not a story of the past, but should instil a personal sense in being and becoming human in the present.

Religion is a positive dimension of human existence, and it imparts meaning and direction in the life of many believers, individually and collectively. Psychology of Religion, as we have already seen, is a scientific discipline that approaches and analyses this religious reality from a critical and creative angle, so that it is purified and revitalised to appropriate the ideal that it represents. As history testifies, there would continue to be many unbecoming practices, vicious designs, and fundamentalist projects, politically motivated misuse of religious feelings, etc., under the pretext of religion. In fact, a scientific attitude adopted by psychology of religion, if not pushed to the extremes of annihilating the religious reality itself, would definitely keep the tracks clear for open-minded human beings and communities to integrate the depth dimension of human existence represented by religion, so that a holistic life could be realized.

Saju Chackalackal
Chief Editor, JD

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 157-183

ASSAULT ON RELIGION FROM MODERN BEHAVIOURAL AND NATURAL SCIENCES

Jose Thadavanal[◆]

1. Introduction

The two great challenges religions had to face, and are still facing, in modern times are the challenges posed by the existence of a plurality of religions and the implications of the new discoveries in the behavioural and natural sciences. Religious pluralism has been identified in the past as a major stumbling block in realizing the ideal of the oneness of all humanity and the forming of a world community. In the past, religions and religion-based civilizations have fought each other or at least hated each other because each one held one's own religion as the only one true faith, denouncing all other religions as false and corrupt. Accordingly, outside one's own religion there was no salvation. But humans have now found a way to overcome this once-thought-insurmountable problem. Through a sympathetic study of other religions and through the dialogue between religions humans have now learned to co-exist peacefully in the midst of cultural and religious plurality. The shift from inter-religious hostility to inter-religious dialogue and mutual acceptance, therefore, must be seen as a Copernican Revolution in the field of the growth and development of religions.

Yet another Copernican Revolution is taking place, sometimes silently and sometimes with the accompaniment of a lot of sound and light. The reference here is to the giant leaps made in the natural and biological sciences, especially during the last two centuries, and the need for entering into a dialogue with these branches of knowledge with a view to getting rid of falsehood and superstitions that have crept into these religions because of human ignorance and the erroneous understanding of truth. Scientific discoveries, no doubt, will be of enormous help in cleansing religion of much of its deadwood. Thus, purified and more vigorous, religion can serve humans better in the realization of truth. When we speak

---

[◆]**Dr. Jose Thadavanal** cmi, a long time student-friendly Professor of Psychology at Christ College and Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, holds a doctorate in philosophy of education from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, USA.

of the sciences, the more relevant and prominent ones in this regard are behavioural sciences like psychology, anthropology, and sociology, and natural sciences like astronomy, palaeontology, biology, physics, and chemistry. Other branches of knowledge like archaeology, linguistics and history also have shed much light on the correct understanding of the origin and development of religions. Unfortunately, however, as the title of the article implies, scientific discoveries and facts often become a weapon in the hands of atheistic or agnostic scientists and like-minded people to attack and destroy the credibility of religious faith. Naturally, many have lost their faith in religion or at least it has diminished.[1] This article, in contrast, is a bona fide attempt to see scientific discoveries more positively and in the light of faith, thereby making an attempt to cleanse religions of their deadwood and apparent errors, if any.

2. The Scientific Attitude and the Scientific Method

Scientists everywhere hold that scientific knowledge, which alone is true knowledge, can be obtained only through evidence and verification and that reason alone, not faith, can be of use in this regard. This obstinate position of hard-core scientists often makes communication between the atheistic scientist and the believing theologian difficult. The scientist refuses to concede that there is any alternative method by which truth can be reached.[2] He approaches religion just as he approaches any other natural phenomenon. For him, religion is only a natural phenomenon; it is just the creation of the human mind. Naturally, he rules out both divine intervention in the universe and divine revelation. As he sees things, the universe is governed by the immutable laws of nature. No force from outside the universe can intervene and influence the functioning of the universe either positively or negatively. He believes not in miracles but in the principle of strict causality. For him the scriptures are not revealed texts, they are to be considered and studied like any other piece of literature.[3] A person's religious experience or faith, they say, is a private matter, not something that is open to public scrutiny, and so is neither verifiable nor objectively true. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, is open to public scrutiny and is verifiable, and therefore its objectivity and veracity are indisputable.[4] The behavioural scientists in particular brush aside many a religious thinking and phenomenon as the result of mere wishful thinking, hallucination, or the self-interests of the dominant priestly class.[5]

---

[1] Keeping alive people's faith is of crucial importance because that alone can come to their rescue in moments of despair, failure, pain, loss, and death, and that alone can give them an overall meaning to life and work. Many even believe that "the world community must have a religious basis..." See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby, New York: Crossroad, 1982, 11-12.

[2] See Alan Isaacs, *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, 170.

The scientist and the believer employ radically different methodologies to arrive at truth. The believer reads the scripture – be it the Bible, the Koran, or the Vedas – believing that it is the Word of God and he/she finds the Word of God there. The scientist – be he/she a psychologist, cosmologist, biologist or anthropologist – approaches the scripture as the work of humans and then he/she looks for evidence indicating that it is otherwise. Finding no evidence, he/she concludes that it is nothing but the work of humans. The scientist gathers knowledge by employing a particular method, employed with a particular attitude. This method is the *scientific method* and the attitude is the *scientific attitude.* The steps involved in the scientific method are observation, the forming of hypotheses, verification, and generalization. The scientific attitude is characterized by scepticism, the belief in strict cause-effect relationship, the belief that only observable phenomena are to be investigated, and an unbiased and objective approach on the part of the investigator. A scientist is usually prone to dismissing religious claims because the characteristic of scepticism requires that one should doubt everything which is not proved to be true and valid. Naturally, a scientist refuses to accept as part of his vocabulary concepts like God or the human soul, heaven or hell, rebirth or transmigration, angels or the devil. Theistic scientists, however, try to integrate their faith and scientific pursuits, giving to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The theistic scientists believe that belief must precede knowledge, a position held by St. Anselm as the pre-condition for theologizing. For the secular scientist, reason alone can lead one to knowledge, while faith is of no use in arriving at true, objective knowledge. However, like the theologian, the genuinely theistic scientist also should be, in his investigations, influenced by Anselm's motto, "Faith seeking Understanding," and he should find no problem in integrating scientific truths and the divine realities. This point will be further explained when we discuss the question of reconciling evolution and creation.

---

[3] The position taken by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru is typical of the position adopted by many intellectuals. Nehru did not believe the Vedas are revealed texts, nor did he believe there is any divine revelation.

[4] In the eyes of the intellectuals, the private experience of a mystic may be absolutely true or may be absolutely false. But there is no way one can verify its veracity. Speaking for this position, Alan Isaacs says: "Reason is the only known method by which we can build up our models of the universe: the information derived from revelation *may* be absolutely true, but it is not knowledge in the sense that it is verifiable by percept or by logic." *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, 170.

[5] The last of these points is especially relevant. Hence, great religious founders like Buddha, and in modern times others like Jiddu Krishnamurti, preached a religion devoid of authority. They wanted to free the masses from the oppressive hold of the priestly class.

3. Religious Language as the Language of Mythology and Metaphor

Rudolf Bultmann has defined mythology as "the use of imagery to express the other world in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side."[6] The purpose of a myth is not to narrate an event literally, or tell the truth literally but to create "a particular attitude in its hearers."[7] Especially for early humans, myths, rather than abstract discourses, were a more effective medium to receive a message. As John Hick rightly points out, "Understood in this way, as a style of persuasive discourse, myth-making is obviously enormously valuable; for most people's minds are much more affected by a concrete than by an abstract expression of an idea."[8]

Through their objective, painstaking research scientists and scholars have demonstrated that the language of religions is not the precise, objective, scientific language of science; rather it is an attempt to express certain truths, values, and convictions through the language of mythology and metaphor. Since one cannot expect full historicity or the exposition of a scientific truth in such descriptions, a literal understanding of the religious language is an absurdity in itself. In the religious language there may be exaggerations, later interpolations, *ex post facto* explanations, instances of flights of fancy, attempts to give supernatural explanations and interpretations to natural events or things which baffled them, and so on. Thus, for instance, divinity is attributed to the elephant because of its amazing size and strength, to the monkey because it resembles human beings, to the snake because primitive humans were in awe at the snake's ability to kill instantaneously. Big mountains, big rivers, big rocks and lakes and trees were all attributed divinity. Ancestor worship and the belief in ghosts and spirits are examples of the fear-hope-suggestibility complex working in the minds of humans. Some local heroes were later converted into deities and their powers and achievements were highly exaggerated. Worshipping fictitious heroes as gods is a common feature of the ancient Hindu, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Religions. This feature, however, is totally absent in the great monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Scholars today believe that what these believers did in worshipping different gods was giving recognition to the different energies of the one Supreme God, expressed in the form of different gods, and meant for popular consumption. To the behavioural scientist, however, these are nothing but the wild fancies of the early humans' pre-scientific, ignorant, and superstitious mind. Most of the religious explanations are, according to these scientists, *ex post facto* explanations of natural facts and events. An earthquake or a tsunami, for example, is interpreted as God's punishment.

---

[6] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961, 10, footnote #2.

[7] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, revised edition, London: Collins, 1977, 167.

[8] Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 168.

Early humans were not capable of much abstract thinking. This was especially true with the masses. They were unable to conceive the Divine as pure transcendence. Naturally, the Divine was presented to the common folks through the medium of animals and humans, which they shaped in clay, stone, and wood. Ultimately, therefore, mythic worship is an attempt to make comprehensible the incomprehensible, to make tangible the intangible. In short, mythology and mythic worship are the solutions early humans found out to introduce the transcendent reality to the pre-scientific, ignorant, uncritical, and suggestible minds of the past. There were gods of love and compassion, there were gods of violence and revenge, gods of great energy and power, gods who redeemed people and even gods who demanded blood and sacrifices, gods that bestowed wealth and prosperity and gods that rained destruction and ruin. Thus, they created gods with every characteristic that the human mind could think of. However, only the monotheistic religions could conceive of a single power behind everything visible and invisible; others needed a multitude of gods for all sorts of reasons. While the believer accepts all these developments as the work of a loving God in human minds, the atheistic scientist pooh-poohs this view, brushing aside all these as the mere inventions of a pre-scientific, ignorant, superstitious mind. While modern humans, they argue, seek answers to the puzzles of nature in science and technology, the early humans resorted to mythological explanations and solutions.

Judging by the quality of these myths and legends, one should say that the early humans too had a very sharp and creative mind, but the problem was that they invested it in the wrong place and worked on the wrong stuff. There is also the view that mythological gods are more powerful in capturing the imagination and loyalty of their followers than the God of monotheistic religions. The power of this sentimental attachment and the passion and commitment coming along with it can be clearly seen in the case of a religion like Hinduism. Epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* can stir up people's passion and commitment much more than any theological discourse on the Supreme Being can do, just as the music of the Beatles could stir up people's minds much more than any dry Sunday homily could. In all probability the homily is mighty in its theological depth and logical sequence, but what appeals to the ordinary people is the exhilarating music of the Beatles. This is the power of myth, and this is one reason why religions like Hinduism, which contain a great deal of mythology, and even superstitions and unhealthy socio-religious traditions, are very appealing to the masses even in the age of space probe and the cyber revolution. Sometimes the intellectuals feel pity, not admiration, for those who live in the world of mythology and superstition, totally untouched by what is deemed as objective knowledge.[9] These people would sacrifice everything they have to defend what they hold to be true. But then the point to be borne in mind here is that one's faith is often a matter of blind and passionate belief, it is not a question of accepting something on the basis of verified facts. For that reason, parading any amount of *evidence* will have no effect in changing their cognitive system; they will only stick to it all the more vehemently.

---

[9] For example, just take a look at all that is happening in India because of the belief that a particular spot in Ayodhya, in the State of Uttar Pradesh, is the birthplace of Lord Rāma, himself a mythological figure.

Psychologists like Carl Jung opine that there are certain archetypal themes that are found recurring in all the religions around the world – primitive and tribal religions as well as the great world religions. These are themes like birth and rebirth, death and immortality, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, good and evil, the hero and the devil, the saint and the sinner, the wise old man, suffering and pain, pleasure and happiness, human frailty and the need for placating the gods, incarnations of the Divine, the blessings and wrath of gods, etc. The mythologies of all religions express, in diverse and numerous ways, these archetypal images that are buried deep in the collective unconscious of humanity and are inherited from the ancestors, going back to the earliest days of the human race.[10] According to this view, the archetypal tendency in humans for hero worship impels them to create gods and goddesses with superhuman powers and capability. The human need for hero worship and the natural yearning of the human heart to deify living heroes after their death can be seen in a very striking manner if we look into what happened in Islam after prophet Mohammed's death. Mohammed preached a strict monotheism, and emphatically stated, in unmistakable terms and over and over again, that he is only Allah's prophet, that he is a mere human being. Yet, after Mohammed's death there were strong attempts to deify him. Huston Smith describes the situation after Mohammed's death as follows:

> So highly has the prophet been regarded that his status has at times come near to threatening the monotheism he preached… When Muhammad died there were some who attempted to deify him, but his appointed successor killed the thought with one of the most famous speeches in religious history. 'If there are any among you who worshipped Muhammad, he is dead. But if it is God you worship, He lives forever.'[11]

Moreover, the myth, these scholars contend, holds forth a message rather than objective knowledge or real history. Therefore, they contend that one cannot look for knowledge or history in the scriptures or other myths of religions. The creation stories – stories describing both the creation of the universe and the creation of humans – are typical examples. It will be absurd to conclude that God has revealed verbatim to humans what actually happened in the past in these cases. It will be safer to conclude that these stories are the creation of the human mind, meant to convey the message, in terms understandable to the masses, that the all-powerful Supreme Being is the creator of the universe and all that is in it. While theistic scientists are comfortable with this view the agnostic and atheistic ones are busy trying to find out an explanation for the origin of the universe, life, and human beings, without any reference to a creator God. In short, the behavioural and natural scientists see mythology as humans' earliest attempt to explain natural phenomena. Today we recognize that only science can give the correct answers to these questions. But science was not born then. People, therefore, made use of whatever was available to them, and that was mythology or "pseudo-science." As the scriptures of all religions contain a great deal of mythology, the need of the hour is demythologizing, they contend. The attempts by Rudolf Bultmann and others to demythologize the Christian scriptures must be understood in this context, although sometimes these ventures seem to go too far. In this context it must be also admitted that among all the religions of the world, past and present, the least mythologizing is to be found in the Christian Scriptures, traditions, and teachings. The values of the civilized modern world are mostly derived from the values upheld in the Christian Scriptures and traditions, although currently the non-Western world, especially the Islamic world, is defiantly challenging the universality of Christian or Western values.[12]

---

[10] See Carl G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds., H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953-. See, especially, vol. 9, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," and "The Shadow," and vol. 11, "Psychology and Religion," and "Answer to Job."

[11] Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper and Row, 1986, 322.

As already mentioned, some argue that as far as inducing the faith dimension is concerned, a myth could be more potent and effective than objective, scientific knowledge. When it comes to nurturing the faith dimension of the faithful, perhaps the mythological language can accomplish things which a scientific language, with all its accuracy, objectivity, and precision, can not even dream of accomplishing. Hence the argument is that even in the scientific age the mythological language commands respect because this language alone can effectively communicate the message to the masses so as to strengthen them in their faith. The journey of faith is a mystical journey in which only the truth contained in mythological narrations, not the "knowledge" propounded by scientific investigations, can act as the guiding stars, they alone can illuminate your path, argue the proponents of the significance of the mythological and metaphorical language in religious scriptures. Religion, they say, is a sort of magic. Magic has its own way of accomplishing the result, which is often contrary to the laws of physics. The proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating. That is to say, the efficacy or success of the magic show lies in whether it has succeeded in impressing the audience or in convincing them that the promised effect has been brought about. The audience is in another world, and the laws and principles are different here. Similarly, the believer is in another world, and his cognitive system is totally uninfluenced by the laws and principles that govern this world. The behavioural and natural scientist may denigrate this as the *subjective world.* But the believer is not worried about the objectivity or subjectivity of his/her world, as far as he/she is concerned, that is the *real* world. Now, you and I agree that God is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that God is pure existence, pure intelligence, pure transcendence, i.e., pure extra-dimensional non-matter existence, pure non-matter intelligence, and the supreme transcendence. But how are the masses going to know and love this God of Spinoza and Śankara? Here comes the need for a mythological and metaphorical language.[13]

---

[12] Thus, for instance, values in the Arab or Islamic world, in India, in Africa, and in China are different from the values of the Western world.

Properly understood, therefore, there is nothing wrong with the understanding that scriptural language is mythological and metaphorical. How else can the sacred writer describe the incomprehensible and the indescribable? A metaphor is not the reality, it is only an image of reality; it stands for something else, which is the absolute reality. Prayers, sacrifices, rituals, traditions, etc., also do the same thing – they establish a living relationship between the human being and the supreme transcendence.[14]

---

[13] Joseph B. Campbell gives an intellectual's way of conceiving God: "There is a definition of God which has been repeated by many philosophers. God is an intelligible sphere – a sphere known to the mind, not to the senses – whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere," Joseph B. Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed., Betty Sue Flowers, New York: Doubleday, 1988, 89.

4. Religion as the 'Promoter' of Evil

Not only the behavioural and natural scientists but also others like philosophers, theologians, writers, social activists, rationalists, intellectuals, politicians, and social and religious reformers have accused religion of sowing the seeds of evil among humans. Religion, according to them, divides people, teaches hatred of out-groups, incites bloodshed and even wars, cultivates a closed mind, spreads superstition and ignorance, hampers social, economic, intellectual and scientific progress, and in general dupes people in subtle ways. No wonder these scholars and thinkers hold that hard evidence lends support to Karl Marx's statement that "Religion is the opiate of the masses" and to Freud's characterization of religion as the "universal neurosis." Many believe, as did Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the nineteenth century, that the unfolding of truth cannot be confined to any particular nation or age, rather it is a continuous process. Accordingly, it is not obligatory on anyone to stick to the ignorance, superstition, and empty rituals of a distant past. According to this view, since the unfolding of truth takes place progressively, it is taking place even today, through contemporary humans, and it is perfectly possible to build a common faith in the one Supreme Being and a common code of conduct for the whole of humanity without relying unduly on any particular religion. This view envisages the gradual disappearance of religious differences and the progressive assertion of commonalties, with less emphasis on rituals and traditions and more emphasis on doing good to fellow human beings.

A thorough scrutiny of religions will show that among all religions, ancient and modern, it is Christianity which can boast of an impact that is more positive than negative. Undoubtedly, Christianity too has its black marks: the crusades, the inquisition and the witch-hunt of the Middle Ages, intolerance of other religions, suppression of free thinking, male domination and the suppression of women's rights,[15] and an over-emphasis on other-worldliness, which, at least in some cases, have assumed pathological dimensions. Yet, cancelling out all these shortcomings was the emphasis given to love and to 'doing good', which Christianity inherited from its founder. The overwhelming emphasis given to charitable activities without expecting any mundane profits or rewards, has added to the claim of the divine origin of Christianity. In fact, the emphasis on love as the single most important thing in life is the unique contribution of Jesus; the contributions of no other founder of religion or scripture or other social or political philosophy has come even close to Jesus' contribution in this regard.

---

[14] In many religions, for instance, facing the east, the direction of the rising sun, is of great spiritual significance although scientifically speaking all directions are the same.

[15] On the point of injustice done to women by the Church, James Gurudas, basing himself on the authority of Marga Buehring, makes the following observation:

It is the multitude of superstitions and irrational traditions and practices that has forced many to regard Hinduism as a mere creation of the humans. As Hinduism has no one specific founder, it is a crystallization of beliefs and traditions of generations of people, especially the Vedic Aryans who share a common ancestry with the ancient Greeks and Romans not only in the case of race and language but even in religious matters. The Vedas, the earliest religious texts of humanity, contain many spiritual and theological insights, but they also contain the seeds of later perversions. The first gods, Indra, Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya, Marut, Ushus, etc., were personifications of the powers of nature. Later, more and more evil, all pointing to the overwhelming role played by the human factor in Hinduism, crept in. For instance, think of all the harm done by the "fantastic" mythologies, the negative developments brought about by the laws in the *Manusmṁrti*, the selfish interests of the Brahmin priestly class, the theory of Karma or fatalism, the caste systeṁ, untouchability, low status of women, practices like Sati, child marriage, and the Devadāsi system, astrology, occasional human sacrifices, the "sacred" cow, monkey, serpent, and elephant, and the endless repetition of empty and lifeless traditions and rituals. The Brahmin-sponsored notion that only the Brahmins would achieve salvation and one would need hundreds of

---

"No honest Christian would deny the reality of injustice being done to women in the name of faithfulness to the Bible. For validation and justification of all its teachings and actions, whether justifiable or unjustifiable, logical or illogical, the Church has always looked into the Bible, and sought out "*dicta probantia*," proving pronouncements." James Gurudas, "Gender Justice in the Bible," *Journal of Dharma* 29, 2 (April-June 2004), 130.

thousands of lifetimes to achieve this goal[16] is a typical example of the Brahmins' attempt to assert their superiority over all other castes, thereby capturing for themselves all the rights and privileges. Many believe that if it were not for the contact with Western Culture and the introduction of English education in India, Hinduism would have degenerated into something worse.

Perhaps it is an accident of history that Islam as a religion has always been misunderstood by others, especially the Christians, the Jews, and the Hindus. According to this view, because of its "cult of violence" and intolerance of others Islam has wreaked havoc on humanity ever since its inception. Concepts and practices like the Jihad, polygamy, attitude toward the 'infidels', and a general tendency for bloodshed without any scruples make many believe that Freud is right in saying that sex and aggression are the two most powerful drives in humans and that everything one does is a direct or indirect attempt to fulfil these two basic drives. Besides, it is claimed that Islam itself spread through the power of the sword, not through the power of love as in the case of Christianity. While 'love' has always been accepted as coming from God, modern humans have difficulty in accepting violence and bloodshed as coming from an all-loving and all-good heavenly Father. But then there is always the counter-argument that the perversions of certain individuals or even groups cannot be blamed as the inherent weakness of any particular religion.

The Asian religions like Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism are accused to be not in touch with contemporary realities, and so anti-modern and anti-progress. Buddhism, for example, is said to breed pessimism and total inactivity. Buddha saw the whole life as nothing but *dukkha* or "suffering," and the cause of all suffering is "desire." All that Buddha did was to preach a way to obtain liberation from the ubiquitous pain and suffering. In fact, Buddhism arose as a reactionary movement against the dominance of the priestly class. Buddha himself abandoned all tradition, including the use of the Sanskrit language, and urged his followers to do the same. Buddha's only concern was the concrete realities of life here on earth; he was not bothered about the supernatural or the life after. All appeal to gods and the supernatural, Buddha felt, was a clever way to hoodwink the people, a clever way to divert the attention of the people from the hard, practical task of self-reliance and responsibility. Whether Buddha really denied the existence of God is a much-disputed question, but Buddha's religion which rejected the supernatural, theology, divine grace, authority of the priestly class, rituals, and tradition, stands apart from all other religions as a purely human-oriented as God-oriented religion. As far as the modern critic is concerned, Buddhism fails the test on two counts: First, it does not foster humans' dependence on God and, second, it stifles human achievement motivation which is the key to all material success and progress. Buddhism, critics say, may be suitable for the unproductive psyche of an unproductive people living in an unproductive land like traditional Tibet, but not for the sophisticated people living in the modern space-age world.

---

[16] Manu has given a detailed description of how a person will be reborn, as a punishment for sins, in various forms. As G. T. Bettany puts it, "For corporeal sins a man will be reborn as a plant or a mineral; for verbal sins, as a bird or a beast; for mental sins, in the lowest human state. The slayer of a Brahmin will be re-born as a dog, boar, ass, bull, etc.; he who steals gold from a priest will be born a thousand times in the bodies of spiders, snakes, etc." G. T. Bettany, *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, New York: Darset Press, 1988, s.v. "Modern Hinduism."

The Jews were hated, isolated, and persecuted throughout the Christian centuries mostly because of their religious identity. "Indeed, a whole day would not suffice to tell all [about the Jews… the] most miserable of all men," wrote St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century.[17] The holocaust was only a culmination of what had been smouldering for centuries, although it was done by the hands of evil men, not religious zealots. As Paul van Buren, a Christian theologian who is an advocate of Jewish-Christian relations, pointedly rebukes us, "… our historic contempt of the Jews helped us to quietly look the other way when a full third of God's people were slaughtered."[18] This, in fact, amounts to faith leading to fratricide.

Jewish-Christian and Protestant-Catholic hostilities were not a peculiarity of Europe. It was there in the United States as well. As early as the late 18th century George Washington had described the new nation as a country where religious tolerance is the official policy.[19] But what actually happened in the following centuries was a different story. Bellah and Greenspahn describe the situation as follows:

---

[17] John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, 1.7, PG 48.853, quoted in Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, eds., *Uncivil Religion: Inter-religious Hostility in America*, New York: Crossroad, 1987, 3.

[18] Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, Part I, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980, 51.

[19] Cited in Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, Introduction, vii.

> The facts of American life have not always been as benign as the United States' official policy of tolerant religious pluralism. In the last century, Mormons were subjected to the kind of persecution more commonly associated with the Middle Ages, and American Protestants have long rejected Roman Catholics as an alien presence. A poll taken during World War II disclosed that more than twice as many people considered Jews to be a "menace to America" than were concerned about Japanese or Germans.[20]

Religion is further accused of cultivating a closed mentality. While closed-mindedness and dogmatism are believed to be anti-progress and anti-truth, open-mindedness and the spirit of free investigation are held to be conducive to progress and the discovery of truth in all its dimensions. The orthodox believer, always supporting tradition, dogma, and authority, is considered to belong to the "hopeless" closed-minded group. Religious fundamentalists are typical examples of extreme closed-mindedness. The clash between creationism and evolutionism is another example. While open-minded people like Teilhard de Chardin have attempted to reconcile science and religion in this case, the camp of the closed-minded fundamentalist believers still stick to a literal understanding of the biblical account of creation. Again, the closed-minded people still refuse to give up the notion that there is a separate, invisible entity existing in humans, called the "mind," while the modern psychobiology has convincingly proved that "mind" is nothing but the functional aspect of the brain, especially that part of the brain called the cerebral cortex. Again, much of the religious phenomena coming under "visions" and "voices" are proved to be the outcome of hallucinations and delusions. Many other phenomena, which humans did not fully understand in the past, were interpreted as interventions by God or gods – either to punish or reward humans or to demonstrate the power of the Divine. Anything out of the way was interpreted as a miracle or Divine intervention. Certain behavioural peculiarities and their cure can be explained in terms of psychological concepts like hysteria, psychosomatic illness, paranoia, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive behaviour, etc., while the medical sciences can give explanations for many others. Humanity's understanding of truth,

---

[20] Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, Introduction, vii.

God, and God's way of acting in his universe must also evolve with time. It is illogical to think that the growth of knowledge and understating of the Divine stopped several hundred years ago and that no further growth of understanding or knowledge is possible. God's way of revealing himself to humanity is subtle and mysterious, and it occurs through a very long process. Only if we keep our eyes and mind open we can catch hold of the truth that is being revealed progressively.

5. The Unconscious and Religion

Psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung see the work of the unconscious mind of humans in the origin and development of religion. Psychological and anthropological studies show that the themes of all religions in all cultures are approximately the same – the same universal theme but expressed slight differently depending upon cultural variations. The parallel nature of the themes compels scientists to speculate that probably there are specific genes that produce the religious orientation in humans. That is to say, just as the genes create in us the need for love, self-preservation, food, water, and so on, there must be also genes that produce in humans the quest for the ultimate origin and meaning of all these, a quest that culminates in the pre-supposition of an all-powerful Divine reality/realities that create and sustain the visible and invisible universes and all in them. What the scientist calls the pre-programmed genes may be understood as what Jung calls the "collective unconscious," which is the racial memory of humanity. Unless there is something pre-programmed in our genes, argue the scientists, one cannot account for the striking similarity of the motifs in a variety of religions all over the world, from primitive times to modern. Behavioural and natural scientists see the mythologies of religion as humans' earliest attempt to explain natural phenomena. According to these scientists, only science can give us an objective and accurate understanding of natural phenomena, but science was not born then. Thus the early humans, utterly devoid of any scientific knowledge, attempted to explain all that they saw and experienced, in terms of supernatural forces.

Freud, with his materialistic and atheistic philosophy of life, was extremely antagonistic to the idea of God and religion. In his view, the idea of God is a projection of the human mind, religion an "illusion" and a "universal neurosis," and the believers are neurotics.[21] Freud held that underneath every religious feeling is a craving for power and protection. Branding religion as an illusion, Freud attempted to tell the "true story" behind the origin and growth of religion. He held that religion has its roots in the ignorance and fear of primitive people. Freud argued that when they encountered the terrors of nature, primitive people experienced fear and helplessness. Out of this anxiety and helplessness they "invented" the idea of god/gods and religion as a source of power and protection. Thus, when faced with a threatening universe, primitive people comforted themselves by shielding them with the "power" of an "illusion," which in fact is nothing but the creation of their own unconscious minds. Since people have experienced in their vulnerable and helpless childhood years, and also in their adolescent years, the nurturing care and protection of their parents whom they perceived as loving, omniscient, and omnipotent, they imagined god as a superparent who will extend to them safety and security in a threatening universe. Thus, human beings create an imaginary deity, a divine father-figure, and surrender themselves before that "supreme power" with the belief that their safety and security are now assured and that all their needs will now be met. People also believe that this supreme power or god/s could be influenced by their praises, prayers, and actions. Thus, there arose mythologies, hymns, prayers, rituals, sacrifices, and traditions. According to Freudian assumptions, people believe in gods expecting three things from them – protection from the terrors of nature, the ability to get oneself reconciled with the cruelty of fate, and receiving compensation for the sufferings which people have to endure in this life. Freud added that the believers regarded religion as a source of knowledge and, in this regard, religion competes with science. Incidentally, scientists believe that as years pass by, the role of religion as a source of knowledge will progressively decrease and that of science will steadily increase until, finally, scientific knowledge will more or less totally replace religious knowledge.

Other unconscious elements too have had a prominent role in humans' religious experience. Among these is the idea of good and evil as opposing forces, and life as a relentless conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. This idea is perhaps most prominent in

---

[21] See Sigmund Freud's works: *The Future of an Illusion*; *Moses and Monotheism*; *Civilization and Its Discontents*; *Totem and Taboo*.

Zoroastrianism, but Judaism and Christianity also have been influenced by this concept. Zoroaster taught a dualistic principle, according to which Ahura Mazda, the good spirit, is constantly antagonized by Ahriman, the evil spirit, who is the originator of everything evil. Carl Jung explains humans' awareness of evil in the world in terms of the archetype of *shadow*. According to Jung, the shadow archetype consists of all the animal impulses in humans which they inherited from the lower forms of life as part of the evolutionary process. Thus for Jung it is the archetype of shadow that is responsible for the animal nature in human beings. This archetype, i.e., the deep awareness of the evil side of their nature, creates in humans the concept of original sin. When the concept of evil is projected outward and personified, it becomes the devil, the perennial enemy of God and humans.[22]

Behavioural and natural scientists see the birth of religion or religious awareness as the result of a specific development during a particular stage in the evolution and growth of the human mind, especially intellectual and cognitive development. They note that the period around the sixth century BCE was a busy one as far as the origin of religions is concerned. This was a period of great religious awakening. During this period the great prophets preached in Israel and Judah, Buddhism and Jainism were founded, and some of the great books of Hinduism were written. Several hundred years before that, Moses did his work as a great religious leader, the Vedas were composed, and Zoroaster preached his religion in Iran. All these, believe the behavioural and natural scientists, represent a particular stage in the evolution of the human mind and its cognitive powers. Very-early-man was not capable of thinking; gradually, as his cognitive capacity improved, he produced gods and mythologies and religion, but was not yet capable of higher level thinking in which the scientific attitude and the scientific method are key ingredients. Later, with humans' mind further developing, science developed, which, eventually, especially from the time of Copernicus and Galileo, became a threat to religion, which at first tried to suppress scientific inquiry, but in vain. With scientific development humans have adopted new ways of formulating values and new ways of understanding the Supreme Being, the universe, planet earth, and the origin of life, especially human life.

---

[22] Carl G. Jung, "The Shadow," in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9, part II, eds., H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.

6. Faith and Science as Complementary: The Case of Creation versus Evolution

Religion and science were at odds with each other for centuries. Each viewed the other with suspicion. But there has been a change in the attitude of the Church recently. Today the Church recognizes that "the two truths, of faith and of science, can never contradict each other."[23] Religions in general now accept science as a genuine partner in the perennial search for truth. In order to demonstrate the increasing role of science in finding out truth, just one case may be mentioned here. Science is now coming closer to solving the mystery of the origin of humans on earth. The latest evidence come from analyses of mitochondrial DNA, which is the genetic material inherited solely through the female line. These studies show that modern humans or *homo sapiens* or all the humans living today are descendants of a single female human being, whom scientists have nicknamed "the mitochondrial Eve," who lived in sub-Saharan Africa (Africa south of the Sahara desert) some 200,000 years ago. The report of a study on the migration route of early humans, conducted by a team of geneticists led by Vincent Macaulay of the University of Glasgow, which drew its findings from an analysis of mitochondrial DNA, said: "Everyone in the world can be placed on a single family tree, in terms of their mitochondrial DNA, because everyone has inherited that piece of DNA from a single woman, the mitochondrial Eve, who lived some 200,000 years ago."[24] Unlike the palaeontological studies, which are based on inferences drawn from pieces of bone and teeth, the mitochondrial DNA studies are capable of producing very accurate and reliable results, scientists agree. Macaulay's team has calculated that the emigration from Africa occurred some 65,000 years ago, reached the coasts of India and Southeast Asia to eventually make its way to Australia 50,000 years ago.[25]

---

[23] These are the words of Pope John Paul II. See the Proceedings of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, November 10, 1979, PDF files, page 2, quoted in Mathew Chandrankunnel, *The Condemnation and Rehabilitation of Galileo Galilei*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 213.

[24] "Migration Route of Early Humans," *The New Indian Express*, May 14, 2005, 11.

[25] "Migration Route of Early Humans," 11.

While some archaeologists say that Europe was colonized by a second migration that came north out of Africa, Macaulay's team says there could have been just one migration. "Therefore, people from the southern migration, probably in India, must have struck inland to reach the Levant and, later, Europe," said the report.[26] It was an offshoot of people who came from India and Iran that eventually reached Europe, the report further said. There was only one migration of modern humans out of Africa and it consisted of a single band of hunter-gatherers, probably just a few hundred people strong, Macaulay's report said.

The curious thing is that the report bears a striking resemblance to the Biblical account of the creation of man and woman, although the "truth" is expressed in mythological language in the Biblical account. The geneticists' reference to a single mother, "the mitochondrial Eve," from whom all modern humans descended, is of particular interest. Now, how did "the mitochondrial Eve" appear on earth? A literal understanding of the Bible would mean "through a direct and sudden act of creation by God." But science would say: "Through a long period of evolutionary process." The "Garden of Eden," for the believer, becomes a metaphor for sub-Saharan Africa.

At this juncture, it would be relevant to examine whether religion and science are propounding the same truth, although expressed in different languages. At the very outset, a word of caution is in order. It will not be accurate to state that the scriptures are stating scientific facts through the language of mythology and metaphor. Those who wrote the scriptures, or the founders of religions whose words and actions are recorded in the scriptures, did not know anything of modern science, nor was it God's intention to give to humanity, through these specially chosen individuals and through the language of mythology and metaphor, the secrets of modern science like the theories and concepts of the Big Bang, nuclear energy, gravitational force and electromagnetic energy, the age of the universe, and the role of the genes and DNA in the life of organisms. God was only giving a spiritual message to humanity. Again, the expression, "God *talking* to humans" is nothing more than an allegorical expression. Such expressions are to be understood as anthropomorphic ways of expressing ideas. God is not a "person" with mouth, tongue, and lips to "speak" to humans. God does not "speak," he only *inspires* humans;

---

[26] "Migration Route of Early Humans," 11.

to be precise, he inspires the cerebral cortex of human beings, which is the seat of all intellectual and mental activities. When the inspired message is expressed through writing or speech, it may be influenced by a variety of personal and socio-cultural factors, and this could be one of the reasons for the significant variation in the "truth content" of various religions.

Let us go back to the question of the origin of human beings, which has led to the heated "creation versus evolution" controversy.[27] The crux of the problem here is that both camps misperceive each other's positions. Here a few clarifications on the nature of both evolution and theistic evolution, or God's plan of purposeful evolution, may be of some help in better understanding the issues and overcoming the impasse. In the first place, it must be understood that evolution does not proceed in a purely linear fashion, keeping the same slow pace always. At certain stages evolution proceeds through a sudden "leap" or spurt. That is to say, suddenly a significant mutation occurs, which produces a sudden qualitative change or species change in the organism. For instance, the anthropoid "Lucy" that lived in Africa 3.5 million years ago was neither an ape nor a human, she was in between the two. That is to say, through some sudden mutational change she had left the "kingdom" of the primates but did not yet reach the "kingdom" of humans. It took millions of years again for either her descendants or the descendants of one of her "cousins" to undergo other "sudden changes" and become the sub-Saharan "Eve," who lived 200,0000 years ago and is believed to be the single mother of all humans living today. Now the question is who brought about these sudden "leaps?" The atheistic scientist would answer, "Nature," the believer, "God." The problem could be solved if one bears in mind that the believer's "God" is what the scientist calls "Nature."

Our species took about six million years to evolve from an ancestor who was common to us and the primates. During these six million years many of the "cousins" or the parallel species became extinct, leaving us humans to emerge as the final victor. "We had," points out Jacob Abraham, "a number of cousins including the Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis who had bigger brains than we have, were intelligent, spiritually sensitive and resourceful. They dominated the earth for about

---

[27] See George M. Marsden, "A Case of the Excluded Middle: Creation versus Evolution in America," in Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, 132-155.

50,000 years but were slowly and steadily replaced by Homo Sapiens."[28] Our species, the Homo Sapiens, has evolved from the branch called Homo Erectus.

"Nature" or God can produce a new species by making slight but powerful changes in the number and type of an organism's genes. Thus, for instance, the difference in genes between the human and the chimpanzee is less than two percent. Therefore, only a few hundred mutations were necessary to separate the humans from the chimpanzees. Among these, less than 50 genes are responsible for the higher order characteristics of humans, like intellectual and mental activities, speech, awareness of the Divine and the supernatural, a moral sense, free choice, and so on. These few genes allow the human brain to enlarge to 1,400 cc, which makes it possible to develop the 10^{19} neural connections, which in turn produce all the sophisticated intellectual and mental behaviour in humans. The very complex and mysterious ways in which evolution works is, in fact, very difficult for us to comprehend fully. Just see how, with a few genetic mutations, Nature has produced us humans who are vastly superior to our immediate predecessors. Now, with the cracking of the human genomic code we know that we have only 30,000 genes and that this is only double the number of what a very low creature, the worm called nematode, has. However, it is amazing to note that these 30,000 genes contain three billion pieces of specific genetic information in the form of DNA encoding, all arranged in the form of a string. Hence, all evidence shows that evolution is a planned and purposeful "march" toward a goal, not a mere random "throwing of the dice" by Nature, and a believer's eyes can easily discover the fingerprints of God in every stage of evolution. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between faith and reason, but he made it clear that both can lead a person to the same knowledge of God, although the methods employed by the two are different. Perhaps nothing illustrates this fact more convincingly than the creation-evolution reality. Teilhard de Chardin, a person who laboured all his life to reconcile faith and science, speaks of the need for, and the importance of, this 'revised' approach in the understanding of evolution as God's plan for humanity:

> For my own part I can see no reason at all, theological or traditional, why this 'revised' approach should give rise to any serious difficulty.

---

[28] Jacob Abraham, *The Quest for the Spiritual Neuron*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 65.

> And it seems to me certain, on the other hand, that by the very fact of making this simple readjustment in our 'eschatological' vision we shall have performed a psychic operation having incalculable consequences. For if truly, in order that the Kingdom of God may come (in order that the Pleroma may close in upon its fullness), it is necessary, as an essential physical condition, that the human Earth should already have attained the natural completion of its evolutionary growth, then it must mean that the ultra-human perfection which neo-humanism envisages for Evolution will coincide in concrete terms with the crowning of the Incarnation awaited by all Christians.[29]

Chardin further observes that this new vision alone can offer some hope to the "human beings torn between a Marxism whose depersonalizing effect revolts them and a Christianity so lukewarm in human terms that it sickens them."[30] That is to say, neither an atheistic, purely materialistic science nor superstitious religions can "redeem" humanity; humanity needs a creative synthesis of the message of religion and the verified facts of science.

7. The God of the Scientist and the Intellectual

Among scientists and intellectuals at last, a trend of belief is slowly developing that God is, to borrow Rudolf Otto's words, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, and that all religions are nothing but human attempts, probably assisted by God, to catch a glimpse of this *mysterium tremendum* and present it to the masses using the language of mythology and metaphor. In this sense, even the Christian scriptures are alleged to contain mythological and metaphorical elements.[31] In the eleventh century St. Anselm had written about the inconceivability of God, and now some radical theologians and philosophers are reviving that position. Directly challenging the God/gods of the Vedas and of all the mythologies, Śankara had spoken of a *Nirguṇa Brahman*, a God without any qualities or attributes, a God who is infinite and limitless. Albert Einstein, when he said that he believed in the God of Spinoza, was speaking for many of the modern theistic scientists and intellectuals. Einstein, in fact, was a believer, but a believer in the God of Spinoza, not the God of traditional religions. This fact is well expressed in his famous telegram to a rabbi who wanted this matter clarified. Einstein cabled to the rabbi: "I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings."[32] Einstein's famous dictum, "God does not throw dice," again clearly reveals his belief in a principle and purpose behind everything. The scientist's conception of the world is one in which everything is governed by the immutable laws of causality; without exception every effect has a cause. Accordingly, the intellectuals refuse to believe in the traditional conception of God in which God intervenes in human affairs every now and then. When the great British astronomer, Stephen Hawking, visited India recently, he was asked whether he believed in God. His answer was in the affirmative, but he added that it was not the traditional type of belief in God. According to the theistic scientists, our language is incapable of defining or describing what is indefinable and indescribable. Some would describe the Divine as the "mind" of the universe or the "cosmic intelligence."

---

[29] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, London: Collins, 1964, 280.

[30] Chardin, *The Future of Man*, 281.

[31] See Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 165-179; Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, New York: Crossroad, 1988, 32; *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Bartsch.

In earlier times humans' knowledge of the natural world was very limited, and they were dissuaded by religions from venturing into the area of gaining more knowledge. That is to say, before the acquisition of all the vast amount of knowledge that we have today about the universe and our planet and life on it, religions explained everything about God and the humans in "simplistic" terms, using an anthropomorphic and mythological language. Things were very simple and easy then. But the situation has changed today. Modern scientists are no more afraid of venturing into such "forbidden lands." They turn their microscopes and telescopes to everything before them, with the result that today we have a more informed, enlightened humanity, which is less prone to accepting superstitions and false traditions. With the dawn of the new age it has become clear to humanity that God or the ultimate reality cannot be comprehended and explained that easily. In fact, one of the fundamental ideas implied in the concept of the unity of all religions and the dialogue between religions is this belief that God is the mystery of mysteries, and every religion is an attempt to comprehend, in whatever way possible, this great, inscrutable, and fascinating mystery.

---

[32] Cited in Isaacs, *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, 169.

Intellectuals and thinkers have recently raised questions about whether our past understanding of God and his will for humanity was correct and coherent. Religious fundamentalism, inter-religious hatred, sponsoring violence and bloodshed as part of God's will, and the historic hatred of the Jews are often given as examples. One of the recent websites of the Al-Qaida leader in Iraq, Abu al-Zarqawi, declares: "Allah wants us to kill all infidels who are the enemies of Islam. In that process, some innocent Muslims, including women and children, may also get killed. But that is inevitable, they have to contribute to the cause of Jihad by sacrificing their own lives." One must be another terrorist to believe that this is what God wants some of his children to do to some other children of his.

As mentioned earlier, St. Anselm in his *Proslogion* propounded the theory of the inconceivability of God. This idea has again become fashionable among intellectuals, scientists, and philosophers. Toeing this line, the logical positivist A. J. Ayer claimed that all religious language is meaningless. The adherents of this school of thought are against the idea of a personal God. According to them, a personal God is a purely anthropomorphic way of conceiving the formless, extra-dimensional Supreme Being. Anthony Kenny, another British proponent of this view, puts it bluntly, "... to be a person is to have a mind and a will, to have beliefs and desires..." The modern theist intellectual or critic does not deny the existence of God; he/she is affirming only two things. First, God must in no way be conceived as a 'person' as we understand the term today and, second, nothing can, in principle, be known, and so said, about God. All that we can say about God is to assert Anselm's definition, "God is 'that than which no greater can be conceived.'"[33] Thus, God may be perceived as "The Great Cosmic Mystery," "Pure Transcendence," "Pure Consciousness," "Pure Existence," "the ground of all beings," "Pure non-matter Intelligence," "that which is beyond all names," etc. This Great Mystery is transcendent and beyond comprehension. As Bede Griffiths succinctly puts it,

> The Cosmic Mystery itself is beyond words, beyond thought. It is an inexpressible mystery, manifesting itself in the cosmos; infinitely transcendent and not to be uttered; *neti, neti*: 'not this, not this.' It

---

[33] "*id quo nihil maius cogitari potest/posit.*"

> manifests [itself] in the whole creation, so that the whole creation is filled with the presence of God...
>
> ...Paramātman, the Supreme Spirit, is beyond word and thought... [34]

In Indian thought Śankara is the great champion of the impersonal God, a Brahman without attributes or *Nirguṇa Brahman.* In the Vedas personal gods are emphasized. The *Upaniṣads*, on the other hand, advance the concept of an impersonal God. Śankara revived the Upaniṣadic tradition. Śankara makes a distinction between "lower" and "higher" knowledge. "Lower knowledge" refers to the knowledge coming from scripture, ritual observances, and intellectual study whereas by "higher knowledge" Śankara means the sheer intuitive power by which reality is apprehended. According to Śankara, certain parts of the Vedas contain lower knowledge, that is, they prescribe rituals, prayers, and hymns; but this is meant for use by those who are relatively dull in intellect and are slaves to carnal and worldly desires, those who cannot comprehend Brahman through higher knowledge. But the Upanishads, which contain the higher knowledge, are meant for those who have freed themselves from such low impulses and desires, and have achieved high levels of intellectual and mental concentration. Śankara holds that the masses who are under the grip of *avidya* or ignorance cannot conceive Brahman without qualities. Only those who have extracted the thorn of ignorance embedded in the Self can conceive the Brahman without qualities. The "lower knowledge," according to Śankara, communicates to humans in relative and worldly terms the ultimate reality, which is the indescribable Brahman without qualities. No wonder, the theistic scientists and intellectuals prefer to follow the path of the "higher knowledge" which leads to the knowledge of the impersonal, qualityless Supreme Being. To them, the concept of personal God/gods is an over-simplified version of reality, which is not in tune with the spirit of the scientific age.

However, as far as the ordinary human being is concerned, devotion to a personal God is the only way to salvation. The path advocated by the *Upaniṣads* and Śankara is mostly untrekkable for them. Thus, the *Bhagavad Gītā* taught of achieving salvation through devotion to a personal God, a *Bhagavān*, a 'Lord'. In much of later Hinduism, the Supreme Being is worshipped through various manifestations, especially

---

[34] Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, London: Collins, 1983, 109-110.

Śiva and Viṣṇu. Kriṣṇa and Rāma, the two widely worshipped gods, are incarnations or *avatārās* of Viṣṇu.

Scientists and intellectuals believe that even in a civilized society, the people who form the lowest stratum intellectually, educationally, and psychologically are attracted by the popular forms of religion. But those at the highest stratum shun the popular forms; instead, they opt for a purely intellectual approach toward God, worship, and the good life. Many of them do not even feel the need for organized religion and religious authorities. The stance adopted by Jiddu Krishnamurti, an enlightened modern Hindu thinker, is typical of the above position. Krishnamurti contends that the authorities and dogmas of organized religions keep humans fettered to all sorts of superstitions and ritualism. Organized religions and their authorities, feels Krishnamurti, will not tolerate free thinking. No challenge of any sort is tolerated. They will not allow us to find out truth for ourselves, they will tell us what it is. Intellectuals and the "enlightened" ones believe that only when one breaks away from the clutches of organized religions can one find truth because truth is outside these religions. Each one has to undertake the search personally and find out the truth for himself/herself. Thus the religious authorities are seen as a hindrance in achieving truth.

According to the above view, the organized religions, with their elaborate system of priests, gurus, authorities, hierarchy, and organized beliefs will only distract our mind in our search for truth. They want to imprison us in the cage of dogma, superstition, hope or ritual. A cage is always a cage or prison; truth exists outside this cage. But they won't let people get outside the cage lest they should discover the truth. In such a situation, one can't perceive the reality.

The intellectuals and "enlightened" humans do not see why there should be a human medium between God and us. In their view, religion is the direct communion with the Divine, the realization of the oneness of life and freedom from the limitations of personality. According to this line of thought, whenever a religion is identified with beliefs and traditions, it loses its communion with the Divine and gets involved in the mundane affairs of life.

The modern scientists and intellectuals are so self-confident of themselves that they think, of course, in vain that they can grow and develop and find the meaning and fullness of life without any help from organized religion or its institutions. Krishnamurti's words echo the view of this group:

> … whatever the consequences may be, after all you can grow, you can fulfil yourself, only through your own experience, through your own greatness, through your own uniqueness, through your own *Dharma*, and in no other way. Religion, traditions, institutions, dogmas, books, prophets are of no value to the self.[35]

8. Conclusion

Modern behavioural and natural scientists and other intellectuals view religion and religious phenomena critically; they attempt to measure them with the yardstick of objectivity, historicity, and scientific validity. One thing that must be borne in mind here is that, with the passage of time humans' understanding of the Divine and other spiritual realities must also evolve and grow; it must be dynamic rather than static. What the early humans, with their limited scientific knowledge, understood then in a rather imperfect and superstitious manner, must be conceived now in a more advanced, coherent, logical, and objective way. Any impartial person would agree that in this context the behavioural and the natural sciences, with their sundry new knowledge and discoveries, can come to the aid of humans in more ways than one. In fact, there is nothing wrong with seeing the contributions of these disciplines as one of the numerous ways of God to help humanity understand Truth better. Unfortunately, the trend in the past has been to see these disciplines as the foes of religion, not friends. However, it is a welcome sign that a change in attitude is gradually taking place. At the same time, those who borrow from the behavioural and natural sciences, on their part, must be motivated purely by the desire to unearth truth, and nothing else. They must realize that no one will benefit from a prejudiced and unscrupulous assault on religion as it will only make matters more complicated and disastrous for the whole of humanity.

---

[35] Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Early Writings*, I, 155, quoted in R. K. Shringy, *Philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977, 107.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 185-204

COULD WE IMAGINE A RELIGION FOR PRIVATE USE?

Jose Nandhikkara◆

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein made the remark, "Make sure that your religion is a matter between you and God only,"[1] during a discussion when his pupil and friend M. O'C Drury mentioned his intention to be ordained a priest after leaving Cambridge. Wittgenstein did not want to ridicule the idea, nor could he approve it. He thought that the clerical collar would choke Drury one day. He was thinking of the institutional and dogmatic aspects of being a priest in the Anglican Church. He found attempts to make religious beliefs as scientific theories or philosophical propositions offensive and ridiculous. Drury would be tempted to present Christian beliefs as more or less proved scientific hypotheses or logical conclusions in his sermons and teachings, according to Wittgenstein. It was in this context Wittgenstein had made the above remark.

The spirit of the remark is in harmony with Wittgenstein's overall attitude to religion. The autobiographical notes, letters, and conversations with friends reveal Wittgenstein's struggles with religious belief. In his view, in religion, "Once you have been turned around, you must stay turned round" (*CV* 53)[2] and it is a hard job requiring persistent attention and effort because one is working on one's own life, which is an ongoing process of being human. He did not ridicule religious beliefs; on the contrary held them in great respect. According to him, "All religions are

---

◆**Dr. Jose Nandhikkara** cmi, a specialist in Wittgensteinein Philosophy, holds a Licentiate in Philosophy from Gregorian University, Rome, B.A. (Hons.) in Philosophy from Oxford University, and a Ph.D. from Warwick University, both in the UK. He lecturers on Philosophical Anthropology and Philosophical Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore.

[1] R. Rhees ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 117.

[2] *CV* = *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998.

wonderful, even those of the most primitive tribes."[3] He himself, however, never committed to a religion; but confessed, "I am irreligious, but with *Angst*" (*NL* 118, 62).[4] Religion was, for him, "the calm sea bottom at its deepest, remaining calm, however high the waves rise on the surface" (*CV* 61); "A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them" (*CV* 4). He longed for such an ideal, a resting place. In 1946 he was still searching and struggling with himself as he wrote, "And only if I could be submerged in religion might these doubts be silenced. For only religion could destroy vanity & penetrate every nook & cranny" (*CV* 54). He sought the will of God in his life and prayed for the light from above. He said to Drury: "I have a letter from an old friend in Austria, a priest. In it he says he hopes my work will go well, if it should be God's will. Now that is all I want: if it should be God's will."[5] It was also his prayer, "God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone's eyes" (*NL* 135 103 c: 27.7.1947, *CV* 72).

Though Wittgenstein admired religious celebrations, rituals, and symbols, their values were relative for him. He did not approve of street preachers or those who make systems out of religious belief. By and large, he avoided all public religious expressions. As one grows up in religious life, according to his observation, "a man's expression of religion becomes much drier." In a reported conversation in Schlick's house on December 17, 1930 he asks: "Is talking essential to religions?" and replies: "I can well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrinal propositions, in which there is thus no talking. Obviously the essence of religion cannot have anything to do with the fact that there is talking, or rather: when people talk this itself is part of a religious act and not a theory" (*WVC* 117).[6] In religion, language is used primarily as part of a religious act, though it may also be used to describe, defend, explain and elucidate religious experiences and religious truths. However, for believers there is more to religion and following a religion than what they can speak about and they speak more than what they can systematise. "The religion of the future," Wittgenstein thought, "will be without any priests or ministers." It

---

[3] Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 117.

[4] "*Bin irreligiös, aber mit Angst.*" *NL* = *Wittgenstein's Nachlass* (The Bergen Electronic Edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[5] Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 181-2.

[6] *WVC* = *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, B. F. McGuinnes ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

"will have to be extremely ascetic" and people "have to live without the consolation of belonging to a church."[7] A religion devoid of language, rituals, priests, and church could be pictured as "a matter between God and the believer only." It needs to be seen, however, whether such a notion of religion is true.

2. A *Private* Religion?

The question is this: 'Can one follow a religion 'privately' and 'Could we imagine a *religion* ... for private use? ... a *religion* that can only be known to the person himself: to his immediate private life. So another person cannot understand this *religion*' (refer *PI* 243).[8] In Wittgensteinian terms, a *private* religion that is drawn from this remark would be so *private* that it is logically impossible for another person to follow. The content of this religion is exclusively the subjective experience of the believer. To devise and maintain the essential privacy of this religion, the practices of this religion should not be connected with anything that may undermine their radical privacy. Thus, the natural and cultural expressions of beliefs, words, and logical concepts used in other religions are excluded; otherwise, 'someone else might understand it as well as I' (see *PI* 256). It is a religion 'which no one else follows' but which the person alone '*appears to follow*' (refer *PI* 269).

As in the case of *private* language, the issue of privacy in a putative *private* religion is not empirical but logical. A 'private' religion is not just reciting prayers and performing rituals alone in one's room or in the Himalayan peaks or in the Egyptian deserts; nor is it Robinson Crusoe or the last of the Mohican practising religion alone. Individuals can follow religion in physical isolation. It is also possible that a new religion is founded which has only one follower. People may also keep their religion a secret either by choice or by circumstances. All these religious practices are private in some sense, but others could know about them and could also be initiated into them. They are secret religions rather than *private* religions, in the Wittgensteinian sense; they are only contingently private, not logically. In a 'private' religion, it is logically impossible for others to know about it or share in it. Others are excluded logically; it is a matter between God and self only.

---

[7] Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 129.

[8] *PI = Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe trans., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.

This *private* religion fantasy could be sustained only under the influence of a pervasive picture of human experience according to which our experiences are exclusively *private*. According to this picture, the subjective knowledge about sensations, feelings and other experiences, including religious, is infallible. What *seems* to me *is* the case. Moreover, others cannot contest my claims about my religious experience. In this view, my own soul is transparent to myself and inaccessible to others. The objects, events, and processes in it are immediately known by introspection, and they are true. Moreover, these states are independent of behaviour. It seems also that I cannot know of other people's experiences and religious states as I know my own, direct and infallible, as they are inferred only from the observation of their behaviour, an indirect and fallible form of knowledge. I cannot achieve certain knowledge of others' religious experiences; I can, at best, only surmise that things are thus-and-so with them. Further, it seems impossible for another person to have what I have when I have a religious experience. Therefore, if I define 'religious' by reference to what I have, then it is logically impossible for others to know what I mean by the word 'religious'. That means, according to this picture of human experience, my religion is essentially *private*.

On the *private* language model of meaning, the private linguist knows from his own experiences of feelings and moods what the corresponding names stand for. It is his inner experiences that make the words meaningful; for example, he knows what pain is only from his own case. According to Wittgenstein, it would then be possible that the experience that everyone calls 'pain' could be quite different. In his famous example of 'beetle in the box', he showed that it would be possible for everyone to have something different in each one's box. That means the object in the box has no place in the language-game at all, as long as others cannot verify it – "the box might even be empty."[9] A radically

---

[9] "Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case! – Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language? – If

private language is, therefore, without content. Wittgenstein's attempt in the 'beetle in the box' argument was neither to deny nor to affirm existence of the 'beetle', but rather to show that we cannot construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation'. There are sensations, but they cannot be understood as *private* entities. "It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!" (*PI* 304).

If we apply this example to the *private* religious person, the religious experience that he refers to may be different for different individuals; or there might be no experience at all. It would become a "mere ornament, not connected with the mechanism" (*PI* 270). What this shows is that the religious experience cannot play in this language-game at all as an objective entity. A believer's relation to the experience cannot be expressed in terms of 'object and designation'. If one sets himself to make sure his religion is a matter between himself and God only, he would lack any criteria other than his experience. The question is once again whether his experience could serve also as the only standard of his religion. Normally, a measure must be independent of what is measured and a description must be independent of what it is to be compared with if it is to be assessed as a correct or incorrect description. The problem is this: a religious experience cannot be measured by standards other than religious. At the same time an experience cannot be its own standard. It has to have connections with other experiences, religious as well as non-religious. It cannot stand alone logically. Our experiences, including our religious experiences, are objective. They are subjective in the sense that subjects have them and only in relation to the subjects they have a logical status; but they are objective because they are independent of the subject. For a *private* religious person there is no notion independent of the subject. How things are for him exhausts all reality.

A *private* religious person, therefore, will have no way to judge whether he is practising a religion or a superstition or something else. In fact, there is no judging here: "One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk

---

so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty. – No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant" (*PI* 293).

about 'right'" (*PI* 258). Whatever *seems* to me religious *is* religious is not the way to talk about 'religion'! The important distinction between *seems* and *is* is not operative here losing objectivity to a *private* religion. Besides, there is also the issue of normativity, namely, whatever be the case there is something that a believer *ought* to do. The distinction between *is* and *ought* ought to be safeguarded. The crucial philosophical issue is: Can there be 'a religion which is a matter between the believer and God only'? I argue that a radically *private* religion is without content; even the believer cannot practise it; it cannot have objectivity and normativity and, therefore, no use; it is a mere fantasy! Positively, I argue that though religion is a matter between God and the believer, it is a joint venture of nature and nurture sustained by God.

3. Following a Religion

It is tempting to posit a gulf between religious belief and following a religion – to consider the former as something abstract and independent of the latter, which is concrete and contingent. Wittgenstein's investigations into meaning and use, and rules and rule-following help us to clarify the nature of this apparent gap. Though there are differences between belief and practice they are not two entities – one conceptual and the other empirical – that are brought together externally. They are not two things that can be grasped independently of one another. Like the relation between a true proposition and the fact that verifies it or a desire and something that satisfies it (*WVC* 157), the relation between belief and practice is internal. To understand a belief is to recognise what acts are in agreement or in conflict with it, just as to understand a description is to understand what would be the case if it were true or false. There is no gap between them. There are obviously important differences between practices with belief and those without belief. Believers could rightly ask: 'What greater difference could there be?' (refer *PI* 304). There is also an important difference between what we do and what we ought to do in religious matters. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, I argue that 'following a religion is a practice' (refer *PI* 202). My aim is to show that the important elements of objectivity, regularity, and normativity that are interwoven in the concept of practice are operative in religious practices as well. Religions make sense only in the context of objective, regular, and normative practices.

First of all, following a religion is objective; there is a distinction between thinking that one is following a religion and actually following it. Objectivity safeguards the distinction between *seems/thinks* so and *is* so. Whatever *seems* religious to me *is* religious is not an acceptable position. Following a religion is something that a believer actually does, not merely something that seems so to the agent. It is only in the actual practice of a religion that a religion is understood and followed. The *private* religious person is confused to claim that religion is a matter between himself and God only in such a way that only he *knows* that he follows his religion and only *he* can follow *that* religion. The concept of an essentially private religion is incoherent because it is without content and no possible use. A *private* believer cannot keep the distinction between *thinking* that he is following a religion and he *is* actually following it. Without that distinction thinking that one was following a religion would be the same as following it (refer *PI* 202). The idea that following a religion is a practice secures this distinction. Practices provide the objective criteria for following a religion. A believer's sincere belief that he is following a religion, though necessary, is not sufficient to judge that he is actually following a religion.

It is often wrongly thought that what is essential to religion is carried out in the inner realms and any overt actions are mere symptoms of something deeper and mysterious. The external behaviour, according to this view, gets its religious value only because of the inner – intention, attention, devotion, etc. Without this inner factor, rituals are merely gestures and vocal prayer is only lip-service. The mental is what makes those gestures and word-use part of religious practice. Religion is something inner, according to this pervasive picture. Religion, however, is not restricted exclusively to the inner realms; it is something the believers *do* and what we do is connected with the rest of our lives. Though Wittgenstein's remark that "It is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* 204)[10] is true about religion, it cannot be restricted to outward behaviour either. It is neither exclusively a spiritual nor a bodily activity. It is something that living human beings ought to *do* involving the whole of their lives. The first commandment, according to the Bible, is "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."[11] This love is shown in various ways in the stream of life.

---

[10] *OC* = *On Certainty*, G. E M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.

The crucial problem with the notion of a *private* religion is that whether the *private* religious person can confine his religion as a matter between himself and God *only*. A belief in God is expressed in the behaviour and a belief ought to make a difference in the life of the person. The religious faith informs and transforms the life of the believer. If it does not affect his way of life, it is impossible to judge his belief as religious. A belief is judged by the role it plays in the life of the believer. We may compare it with a person in love. A person in love normally expresses his love in various ways. It is possible, however, that someone might keep it a secret from his lover or from his friends. We would not understand him if he hides it both from his lover and others and avoids all expressions of love. A love without any possible expressions of love is incoherent. Being in love makes a person different. He might hide it for some time for particular reasons. A love that can only be known to the person himself, to his immediate private life is, like the *private* language, incomprehensible. A secret lover is possible logically and empirically; but a *private* lover is incoherent. There is no way to judge whether he loves or not, even for himself. The *private* lover will not be able to keep the important difference between thinking that he is in love and being in love. He needs something independent and objective. Parallels can be drawn between a lover and a believer. A *private* believer has no way to judge whether he is following a religion or not. He cannot keep the important distinction between *seems* and *is*. The notion of belief without corresponding practices, like the love without expressions, is incoherent. Both would lack objectivity.

Secondly, there is *regularity*, meaning, following a religion is a repeatable procedure. In order to describe the phenomenon of religion one has to describe a practice, not a one-time occurrence, whatever it might be (refer *RFM* 335).[12] Like other practices, it is repeatable over time (and place) and across persons; a human action that cannot be logically repeated across time (and place) is incoherent. What is possible for one person to repeat over time cannot be logically impossible for other human beings to do. As only one human being cannot follow one rule just once in a lifetime, it cannot be that only *one* human being follows a religion just *once* in his life. One action does not make a practice, religious or not. If I am not justified to judge on the rule-following character of a creature on Mars who looked at something like a signpost, and then walked parallel to it (*NL* 124, 187), I have no justification to judge on its religiosity by observing one action. It must behave in a certain regular way. I need to see the action being repeated a number of times and more importantly its connection with the rest of the Martian's life. Whether I would be able to judge the action of the Martian depends on how much I know about its various forms of life. An action, like a word, can be judged only in the stream of life.

---

[11] Mark 12:30.

[12] *RFM = Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

Following a religion involves the mastery of many interrelated practices and a whole web of human behaviour. One cannot just do an action just once and claim that it is a religious act. One may participate in a religious ritual just once; but the person will not be following a religion by that act alone. The whole circumstance would make the point clear, especially what preceded and followed that act. What in a complicated surrounding, we call 'following a religion', we would not call it so if it stood in isolation; it relates to a way of living. Indeed, religious acts will have their significance only in the context of a regular human life. The bedrock of our practices, including following a religion, is the regularity of practice and agreement in judgements. This is something fundamental. Following a religion takes place in the sphere of actual behaviour of living human beings and its foundations are in the stream of our lives. This cannot be restricted to be a matter between God and soul alone. Religion relates to a regular way of living involving God, community, and the world. As in the other cases of practices, we need normative regularity, not just natural regularity. That is our third point, normativity.

Normativity, here, means that regularity is subject to standards of correctness. Following a religion is concerned with how we ought to live rather than stating how we live. The distinction between *is* and *ought* ought to be kept here; there is a correct way of following a religion. Religious practices are not just regularities of behaviour but regularities that have a normative force, ways believers ought to act. 'Following a religion is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way' (refer *PI* 206). It is manifested in a regularity that is normative which presupposes understanding and judgement from the part of the religious believer. The judgement itself is possible only where an established pattern of behaviour is discernible. It is essential to have such standards of correctness to specify the scope and content of any religious practice. This does not rule out creativity, growth and development in religious belief and practices. As in other practices, we not only inhabit these patterns but also shape them as we go on responsibly and creatively. Believers are active agents living in the world in contact with God, in conversation and collaboration with other fellow human beings.

With regard to empirical and logical practices, the fact that most of us use similar concepts to represent the world means that our judging takes place within the context of an agreed framework such that disagreements are in principle resolvable. "People don't come to blows over it" (*PI* 240), as Wittgenstein remarked. Religious beliefs, however, do not make assertions about the world but propose fundamental ways of living; disagreements about them cannot be resolved by reference to empirical and grammatical facts. In this regard, religious claims have similarities with other value judgements in the fields of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. This does not mean that religious beliefs are arbitrary or that they all have the same status. What differentiates a religious claim from an expression of preference is the claim to general validity, the claim that it is not just one way of being human but the correct way of being human. As in the case of rule-following and linguistic use, normativity is crucial for a religious believer: "How does he know that *he is to make that movement*?" (*PI* 443). It is not the epistemological question of how does the religious believer *know* the matter that matters, but rather the metaphysical question what *makes* an action a correct or incorrect religious behaviour.

In making religious claims believers adopt personal attitudes to the world, community, and God. They are not making opinions that could be independently verified; rather they agree in their judgements about life. The bedrock of the judgements is these fundamental attitudes on the part of the individuals. We learn things by seeing similarities. That is our normal way of learning as Wittgenstein has shown in his example of 'game'. What distinguishes empirical judgements and value judgements is their personal dimension, meaning they are not accepted by all whereas the empirical judgements are accepted by the vast majority of us. Wittgenstein wrote perceptively:

> And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience. And these together would have to result finally in the one under instruction himself, of his own accord, passionately taking up that system of reference. It would be as though someone were on the one hand to let me see my hopeless situation, on the other depict the rescue-anchor, until of my own accord, or at any rate not led by the hand by the *instructor*, I were to rush up & seize it (*CV* 73).

Neither do all people see the situation religiously nor do they rush up and seize the rescue-anchor nor do they go to the same rescue-anchor. In answer to the question 'Why do you find these significant?' believer typically narrates a personal story. Here giving examples and telling stories do not constitute an indirect means of explaining, in default of a better means. In the end, however, they can only reiterate their reaction and say that it is because they *are* significant. Understanding such a response is similar to understanding a piece of music, according to Wittgenstein.

> Why must these bars be played just so? Why do I want to produce just this pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? I would like to say "Because I know what it's all about". But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. For explanation I can only translate the musical picture into a picture in another medium and let the one picture throw light on the other (*PG* 41).[13]

One has to understand the music, its characteristics by similarities of one musical note with another, and its relation to other aspects of human life. Finally, one has to listen to the music and understand it. It is possible that there would be human beings who would lack this musical ear. Similarly, after giving various examples to elucidate a religious picture what believers could say further as a final argument against someone who did not want to go that way, would be: "Why, don't you see…!" – and that is no *argument* (refer *RFM* 50). That is not an argument not because it is something outside the realm of reason, but because it concerns the conditions for the possibility of the operations of reasons in following a religion.[14] But one has to see religious connections in these aspects of life to follow a religion, the way we perceive beauty in aesthetic objects and music in what we hear. As a result of practice, we hear something musical, see something beautiful, and take something religious. What we understand by 'music', 'beauty', and 'religion' transcend what we describe in explaining 'music', 'beauty', and 'religion' and we speak about these phenomena more than what we can systematise. However, as Wittgenstein observes, "Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed," what we take to be musical, beautiful, and religious.

---

[13] *PG* = *Philosophical Grammar*, R. Rhees ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

[14] M. Luntley, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgement*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 110.

If, according to Wittgenstein, "a poet too has constantly to ask himself; 'but is what I am writing really true?'" (*CV* 40), a believer has to raise the same question: 'Is what I am believing really true?' A believer is committed to the truth of what he believes and he cannot be indifferent regarding the truth of what he believes. Though he seeks understanding of what he believes his basic attitude is that of 'I believe in order that I may understand' (*credo ut intellegam*). One does not typically come to religious belief through empirical observation and experimentation or philosophical investigations. They may strengthen or weaken his understanding and foster or purify his faith. Philosophical investigations clarify the concepts involved and their meanings as given by synoptic representations of the respective practices in religious forms of life. One's belief and understanding of them are ultimately shown in one's life.

A believer, like an artist, is committed to the truth of his practice. This does not mean, of course, that the truth of an aesthetic practice is similar to the truth of a religious practice. Though practices and beliefs are internally related and like other aspects of life, religion is also "characterised by what we can and cannot do" (*Z* 345),[15] the ultimate source of normativity in religion is God. Religion, though lived within the contingencies of nature, transcends them. In religion, one has to make a leap of faith, involving a personal judgement and passionate commitment. Though a religious believer belongs to a community, he has to make it for himself. He has to make a commitment, a fundamental option in life that affects his whole life. A believer's ultimate support in this judgement is God. Wittgenstein wrote, "So this can only come about if you no longer support yourself on this earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then *everything* is different and it is 'no wonder' if you can then do what now you cannot do" (*CV* 39). For a believer the sanction and confirmation from God is fundamental. God is the bedrock where all explanations come to rest in religion.

---

[15] Z = *Zettel*, G. E M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

One important problem in understanding religious beliefs is the temptation either to treat them as claims to truth in the same sense as empirical and logical judgements or to dismiss them as incoherent and illusory. The grammatical differences between empirical, logical, and religious judgements show that truth and objectivity cannot mean the same in these categorically different areas of life. With respect to religious beliefs, the correspondence with the facts or with reality is different from that of empirical beliefs. Here, the claim to truth expresses the claim that one way of living or being human is uniquely correct and that the standards embodied in this fundamental attitude are to be recognized by everyone just because this is so. Those who cannot find this religious dimension of human life are like people who hear only noises but not meaningful words or see drawings but not beautiful pictures. They are like people with no sense of humour who can understand the explanation of a joke but cannot laugh. They are blind to certain important aspects of being human. This is not a matter of not having sufficient explanations. We have reached the bedrock of explanations. At the bedrock level, however, the religious beliefs do not stand alone; they are interwoven with other empirical claims and value judgements and held together by what lies around them. They are shown in their lives, in their attitudes to the world, fellow human beings, and God.

4. Religion: Similarities and Differences

Believers deny that there are several equally acceptable ways of living or that one is free to choose as one pleases; instead, they assert that one way of being human is fundamentally correct and ought to be followed by everyone. They typically persuade others to recognize the validity of their claims, but their considerations provide only a framework or a system of reference rather than an independent foundation. They can only persuade others with the need to make a fundamental option that cannot be made on the basis of scientific evidence or philosophical investigations. One can learn this knowledge not by taking a course in it, but through 'experience'. One can also teach others by giving from time to time the right tip. "This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments" (*PI* 227). The rules here do not form a theoretical system but believers follow them rightly as shown in their practices and ultimately in their lives. The believers do not agree that all the frameworks have the same validity and it is up to the individuals to decide whether they consider the claim as ridiculous (perhaps dangerous) superstition or profound insight into the correct way of being human. Wittgenstein wrote: "One can freely compare a firmly rooted picture in us with a superstition; but one can also say that one must *always* come to a firm ground, be it now a picture or not so that a picture at the source of all thoughts must be respected and not be treated as superstition" (*NL* 138, 32b-33a. 20.5.1949).[16] Religious pictures that are at the source of all thoughts and explanations are to be accepted at their face value; they do not stand for something else.

Whether individuals take the picture at the basis as superstition or as truth is a personal judgement, supported by nature and nurture and most importantly by God. Because of the nature of religious beliefs there is no such thing as bringing evidence to demonstrate their correctness or to prove their validity. Evidence may play a role in establishing the nature of the case at issue, but how one should judge the case cannot itself be deduced from any particular evidence. One has to make a judgement and a faith commitment. We make similar judgements in our learning experiences. The teacher can only prepare the ground and persuade the pupil. In explaining the concept of initiating the pupil there comes a point where words run out. "I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on" (*PI* 208). But the pupil himself has to see the connections and make the judgement. Wittgenstein has successfully shown that there are not sufficient and necessary conditions for calling something a 'game' is not an obstacle for calling a game correctly a 'game'. One has to see similarities and connections – *this* is like *that*; this is something fundamental and lies at the bedrock of all explanations. This is part of our being human; human beings generally see the connections.

In learning about religion and coming to faith similar processes are in place and one has to see 'This and *similar* things are following a religion'.

---

[16] "*Ein in uns festes Bild kann man freilich dem Aberglauben vergleichen, aber doch auch sagen, daß man* *immer* *auf irgendeinen festen Grund kommen muß, sei er nun ein Bild, oder nicht, und also sei ein Bild am Grunde alles Denkens zu respektieren und nicht als ein Aberglaube zu behandeln.*"

If there is an argument, "Its purpose is not to convince positively, or convert, but to remove erroneous notions and prejudices" (*WL* 32, 63).[17] While there may be 'proofs' within a particular religious framework, that framework will itself not be founded; from a logical point of view, it is simply one possibility among others; one may take it as superstitious or true faith. Wittgenstein wrote: "If someone asks: How *could* the surroundings *force* the ethical in someone? – the answer is that he may indeed say, 'There's no such thing as must', but at the same time under such circumstances such & such *will* be done" (*NL* 173, 17r. 30.3.1950).[18] This is true about religious faith; one cannot force someone to follow a religion. One hast to rush up and seize the rescue-anchor on one's own accord and not led by the hand of the *instructor* (*CV* 73). This free response believers take as something that they ought to do. The point remains, though many reasons could be offered, that at some stage one has to make a fundamental, personal, and religious judgement. This could be the result of nurture in a religious environment, years of personal study, and search or may be due to a momentous religious experience.

Furthermore, I may be unable to specify the basis of my belief, and yet my belief is not without a basis; indeed, from a religious point of view it has the strongest basis possible. The believer "will treat this belief as extremely well-established, and in another way as not established at all" (*LC* 54).[19] On the one hand, he may cling to it in the face of evidence which would shake any empirical belief, but on the other, he may recognize that his grounds for so doing are nothing like what we ordinarily call 'evidence'. Here we don't talk of probabilities and hypotheses – the game we play is entirely different. The belief forms the basis of our lives, the way in which we see the world. Far from implying that such a belief is arbitrary, Wittgenstein's stress on bedrock allows us to understand the sense in which religious belief can have a basis, even if this basis cannot be fully articulated. From this perspective, someone who finds certain act religious but can give no theoretical reasons for his judgement is neither stupid nor irrational nor irresponsible. He reacts in a certain way, but not arbitrarily; what lies behind his reaction may be a lifetime of thought, reflection, and experience. It is, however, a personal judgement and passionate commitment and is shown in the objective, regular, and normative life of the believers.

---

[17] *WL* 32 = *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge* 1930-32 (From the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee), D. Lee ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

[18] "*Fragt man: Wie könnte die Umgebung den Menschen, das Ethische in ihm zwingen? – so ist die Antwort, daß er zwar sagen mag 'Kein Mensch muß müssen,' aber doch unter solchen Umständen so & so handeln wird.*"

[19] *LC* = *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, C. Barrett ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.

Though these three elements, objectivity, regularity, and normativity are constitutive of religious practice, they do not make the sufficient and necessary conditions for following a religion. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, they are not elements in the practice but belong to its framework (*RFM* 323; *PI* 240). Our attitudes to the world, fellow human beings and God are fundamental. They are not mere opinions that can be proved right or wrong in further investigations. Attitudes come *before* opinions. They shape the character of the stream of religious life. There is a certain 'indefiniteness' and 'variability' with regard to human behaviour, including religious practices. As Wittgenstein observed with regard to judging the genuineness of expressions of feelings, it is most difficult here to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words (refer *PI* 227). This is not, however, ignorance, but a fact of life. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, the concept of following a religion is better understood as a family resemblance concept: 'This and *similar* things are called following a religion'. Like other practices, the background against which we describe a religious practice, it "is the bustle of life. And our concept points to something within this bustle" (*RPP* II, 625).[20] It makes sense to talk of understanding and following a religion, only in the context of a stream of life in which a religion is objectively, regularly, and normatively practised.

5. "Like Our Life" (*OC* 559)

Wittgenstein could admit the possibility of a solitary individual like Robinson Crusoe following a religion – objectively, regularly, and normatively – in physical isolation. There are no philosophical problems about solitary or secret followers of a religion. Crusoe could continue to follow and perhaps also modify his religious practices according to the circumstances. An isolated person in a cave, an island or a desert could follow a religion. This is not, however, a *private* religion as it was only contingently private, not logically. Had somebody heard him and observed him, he could have learned this religion of the single person. For the beliefs are normally manifest in the person's behaviour. Of course, the observer might go wrong. From a logical point of view, what we insist on following a religion is a certain regularity of practices, which is observable by others and capable of judging such acts as following a religion. That is, "he must *behave* in a certain way" (*NL* 149, 22). A practice is a procedure that could be taught and learned, even if, in fact, only one person engages in it at a particular time. A person in physical isolation is not *ipso facto* disqualified from following a religion. It does not matter logically that he is not actually living in a community or that he cannot be instructed by others. We could not call an action 'religious', or a person 'religious', however, if we do not have any further knowledge about the action and the person. Crusoe's behaviour is religious only insofar as it could be so understood and followed by other human beings.

---

[20] *RPP* II = *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 2, G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman eds., Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

A person's sincere belief that he is following a religion is not sufficient, however, to judge that he is actually following it. His actions must be connected with the rest of his life, the stream of his life. What is insisted, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, is that a religious practice cannot be replaced by the appearance of a practice and that it should have resonance in the believer's life. As other human practices, it must be something objective and normative. The notion that one could practise something that no one else could be taught or master is incoherent. In the religious sphere, however, the ultimate source is God. God might teach a single person a practice, or God might enter into an exclusive relation with one person, so that some of his actions have a religious significance for himself whereas others fail to understand this significance. God's demand that Abraham should sacrifice his only son, Isaac, is an example. Ethically expressed such an act is a filicide; religiously expressed, it is a sacrifice. Abraham responded to the divine command supposedly addressed to himself alone and having a content – the killing of his own son. He made a leap of faith. Only for Abraham the act had the religious significance. His relationship to God was of a private nature in the sense that he remained silent. He did not confide in anyone since the paradoxical demand might not be understood even by his nearest. His action was due to his unique relationship to God. He trusted God rather than trying to make himself understood by others.

Others may or may not grasp the religious significance of the sacrifice of Isaac. If others can understand the religious significance, it is not 'private' in Wittgenstein's radical sense. In fact, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and people of different faiths find religious significance in Abraham's readiness to sacrifice even his son. Following Wittgenstein's discussions on rule-following and *private* language what we could point out is that Abraham, however, would not be able to restrict his religious practices just in his intention to sacrifice Isaac. The act gets its religious significance from his other characteristic behaviour, especially his religious behaviour. Without objective, regular, and normative practices, a single act will have no meaning, even for Abraham. What Wittgenstein remarked about words is true about deeds. He wrote: "The words stand in a stream. Only in a *life* they have sense. For the words have meaning only in the stream of life."[21] It is also true that the religious practices, as other human practices, have meaning only in the stream of life. Abraham's act gets its sense only in its relation with other acts of his life, in the stream of his life. Once an act is connected with the rest of his life, it is not private in the special way the *private* religious person wants to set up his religion. The act becomes knowable and others can follow *that* religion. If others are logically excluded from understanding the act's religious significance, Abraham also cannot have a religious dimension of this act.

This does not mean, however, that following a religion is to participate in a way of living in which many people are engaged. Following a religion does not boil down into human habits and consensus. What is correct, in following a religion, cannot be defined as what it is customary to do. The common agreement in opinions, judgements, actions, and forms of life refers to the framework within which the concept of following a religion has intelligible employment, not to the explanation of what 'following a religion' means. It is also not part of the nature of religious beliefs that they are shared; individuals in physical isolation can follow a religion. Religion is not a human convention. "No one who is concerned with trying to know God and to know God's will, is concerned with human convention. He is concerned with the will of God."[22]

---

[21] "*Die Worte stehen in einem Fluß. Nur in einem Leben haben sie ihren Sinn. Denn die Wörter haben nur im Fluß des Lebens Bedeutung*" (*NL* 137, 66a. 3.7.1948).

[22] D. Z. Phillips, *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (assisted by M. von der Ruhr), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 56.

Believers are not merely imitators, aping what the rest of the community is doing. They are followers. They join in and go on faithfully and freely. Believers are living human beings with reason and will who are passionately committed to what they believe and practise. However, as we have seen, the notion of a practice that is by its very nature not shareable is incoherent. The notion of practice here is concerned with objectivity and the shareable nature of an action, rather than the multiplicity of believers. It need not be, in fact, a shared belief and practice but a shareable one. Even in this qualified reading, religion does not become a matter between a believer and God only. It is not a hocus-pocus that can be performed only by the soul (refer *PI* 454). It is an objective, regular and normative way of human living in the world sustained by God with the logical possibility of being with other believers. Whether this way of living is, in fact, in conversation and collaboration with fellow believers is an empirical question and whether it is sustained by God is not answerable empirically or philosophically. We have reached the bedrock in our philosophical investigations.

6. Conclusion

Following a religion, as we have seen, relates to a fundamental way of living. Religion and life are inseparable, for a believer; it shows the basic character and spirit of believers' living. Therefore, the life of a religious person is categorically different from that of a non-religious person. This is not an empirical difference; it is a difference in the attitude of the person. The whole world looks different to him and his attitude to the world is also significantly different. The world of the religious person is different from one who has no faith. He sees religious significance in the very existence of his life in the world. It is his religious point of view that gives him the ultimate meaning of life. For a believer, it is the way of making sense of his life.

Religious life is not merely a practice of certain techniques to develop certain dispositions, but practices to join in and to go on responsibly and creatively following a religion. Wittgenstein rightly noted: "If you want to stay within the religious sphere you must *struggle*" (*CV* 98). It is a spiritual combat to lead a fundamental way of living. For this personal struggle, a believer needs faith. He wrote:

> So this can only be done if you no longer support yourself on this earth, but hang from heaven. Then *everything* is different and it is

> ‘no wonder’ if you can then do what you cannot do now. (It is obvious that someone who is suspended looks like someone who is standing, but the interplay of forces within him is nevertheless totally different & hence he can act quite differently than one who stands) (*NL* 120, 108c).[23]

I cannot believe and practise a religion as long as I rest my whole weight on nature and nurture. I have to suspend myself from heaven; my ultimate support is from above. In religious circles, faith is often characterised as a grace from God;[24] I am supported by God in my struggle to lead a religious life. To believe, I need understanding, though the understanding is characterised by faith and love rather than evidence and logic. As in other aspects of our lives, both reason and passion are involved in making an ongoing commitment to this fundamental way of living, i.e., being a religious person. Religion is a fundamental human way of living in the world in relation to fellow human beings and God; it also shows who we are and how we ought to live. According to Wittgenstein, “… a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence, although it’s belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up this interpretation” (*CV* 73). This is to be seen as a fact of our natural history and a fundamental way of being human. ‘Natural’ does not mean that it is necessary or that it is biological; it means following a religion is a human form of life, a product of nature, nurture, and grace. It is not possible, however, for a living human being to follow a *private* religion because he cannot have objective and normative practices.

---

[23] “*Das kann also nur geschehen, wenn Du dich nicht mehr auf diese Erde stützst, sondern am Himmel hängst. Dann ist alles anders und es ist 'kein Wunder', wenn Du dann kannst, was Du jetzt nicht kannst. (Anzusehen ist freilich der Hängende wie der Stehende aber das Kräftespiel in ihm ist ja ein ganz anderes & er kann daher ganz anderes tun als der Stehende).*”

[24] “*Es heißt – glaube ich –: ‘Glaubt daran, daß ihr nun ausgesöhnt seid, und sündiget, hinfort nicht mehr’! – Aber es ist auch klar, daß dieser Glauben eine Gnade ist. Und, ich glaube, die Bedingung für ihn ist, daß wir unser äußerstes tun und sehen, daß es uns zu nichts führt, daß, soviel wir uns auch plagen, wir unversöhnt bleiben. Dann kommt die Versöhnung zu Recht*” (*MS* 183, 220. 20.3.1937).

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 205-224

SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF YOUNG FEMALE ADULTS

A Psychologist's Perspective

Elizabeth C. S.◆

1. Introduction

The concept of wellness or wellbeing has been evolving in various disciplines, and attempts have been made to develop a description of an individual's total wellbeing. Every human person yearns within oneself to lead a good life and even desires for a life that is peaceful, happy and meaningful. Several authors and researchers have attempted definitions of wellbeing. According to Clinebell, "you are whole or have wellbeing to the degree that the centre of your life is integrated and energized by love and healthy spirituality."[1] For him the whole person's wellbeing includes: Loving oneself by developing one's unique gifts of body, mind and spirit as fully as one can, at each stage of one's life, loving other people by encouraging them to develop their unique gifts; loving one's work, and one's play, i.e., one's vocation and avocation; loving the planet Earth, our mother, and her wonderful network of living things, caring for her and helping her, healing her wounds, and loving the Divine Spirit, the source of all healing and wholeness.

The constitution of the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing, and not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity. Sushrutha, a prominent proponent of the traditional system of Indian medicine defines it as a state characterized by a feeling of spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing (*Prasanna atman Indiraya mana*). Thus, wellbeing is a conglomeration of several dimensions or aspects of psychological, spiritual, social, and physical.

◆**Dr. Elizabeth C. S.**, a specialist in clinical psychology, holds a Ph.D. in psychology from Bangalore University, and is the principal of Jyoti Nivas Pre-University College, Bangalore.

[1] H. Clinebell, *Wellbeing: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life*, Quezon City: People's Wellbeing Center Inc., University of Philippines, 1995.

2. Spiritual Wellbeing

Spiritual wellness is a field of emerging interest today. Over the past few decades, research on spirituality and its relation to wellbeing has increased substantially. A substantial number of research studies suggest the significant role of spiritual aspects in the enhancement of wellbeing. Spirituality is viewed as the motivational and emotional foundation of a life long quest for meaning. This approach is strongly suggested by the work of Frankl (1959), who depicted spirituality as the drive for meaning and purpose. This motivation can be associated with a variety of experiences, which lie outside the realm of both, in substance and function. Thus, spirituality cannot be equated with religion. A cornerstone of the concept of spiritual wellbeing is that people have a need for transcendence. A human person's sense of wellbeing depends in part upon seeing purposes for which to live that lie beyond oneself, goals to pursue, or other transcendent meanings to life's activities. People fulfil this need in many ways, both religious and non-religious or existential. High spiritual wellbeing, therefore, could be understood as a type of happiness or contentment that is a by-product of attending to meanings that lie in a realm beyond oneself. Low spiritual wellbeing could be seen as distress caused by an unfulfilled need for transcendence. In general, the scientific study of religion employs two types of definitions, substantive and functional.[2] Substantive approaches to define religion focus on the belief in an illuminating dimension of experience and on efforts to relate human to the divine. Functional definitions emphasise a religious role in providing meaning in the face of unknown and its stabilising effects upon social groups. Substantive definitions depict religiosity as an end in itself, whereas functional definitions portray religion as a means to some end, be it social control or psychological succour. These two perspectives have been associated with two types of religious motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity.[3] Because of its many research applications,[4] Allport's model of religiosity has been widely studied and concretized.[5] Paragament argued that by polarizing religious means and ends, researchers have distorted the very phenomenon they are trying to study. He suggested that religion be defined "as search for significance in ways related to the scared."[6] In both its personal and social dimensions, religion provides directions describing pathways to significance. Psychologists and philosophers who are in the area of religion have shown little importance in agreeing upon a universally acceptable definition.[7] Instead, most conclude that religion is multifaceted and they seek to understand how aspects of religion relate to various psychological functions and behavioural outcomes. In short, the term "spirituality" may be defined as a sense of relatedness to a transcendent dimension. Spirituality extends beyond religion and can include almost any human experience. The term religion refers to beliefs, practices and rituals related to a specific established religious tradition.

---

[2] Berger, cited in D. A. Mathews, D. B. Larson, and C. P. Berry, *The Faith Factor: An Annotated Bibliography of Clinical Research as Spiritual Subjects*, vols. 1-4, Rockville, MD: National Institute of Healthcare Research, 1974.

[3] G. W. Allport, and J. M. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967), 432-443.

[4] R. L. Gorsuch, "Psychology of Religion," *Annual Review of Psychology* 39 (1988), 201-221.

The research related to various aspects of spiritual wellbeing can be divided into: 1) Self reports by research subjects about the effects of religious commitment on their ability to adapt to life's stresses; 2) Objective examinations of the relationship between religiousness and emotional health in epidemiological survey and treatment studies that have integrated religious beliefs and behaviours into traditional therapies for depression and stress related disorders.

The important reasons for the emergence of spiritual wellbeing research are: 1) Increasing frequency of involvement of people in spiritual aspects; 2) Increasing research based evidence revealing the influence of spiritual aspects on the enhancement of wellbeing; 3) Increasing cost of mental healthcare; 4) Increasing inability of the authorities to reach their services to large segments of population; 5) The miraculous healing power of spiritual healing methods; and 6) Their preventive value. These factors have drawn the attention of research to the field of spiritual wellbeing.

---

[5] Michael Donahue, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiousness: Review and Meta-analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48 (1985), 400-419; Kirkpatrick L. A., and Hood R. W. Jr., "Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The 'Boon' or 'Bane' of Contemporary Psychology of Religion?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, 4 (1990), 442-462.

[6] K. I. Paragament, "Of Means and Ends: Religion and the Search for Significance," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2 (1992), 204.

[7] Gorsuch, "Psychology of Religion."

Shalom, or wellbeing, may be viewed as the integral experience of a person who is functioning as God intended, in constant relationship with Him, with others, and within one's self. *Shalom* describes the experience of being harmoniously at peace within and without. It presents a picture of the person functioning as an integrated system in proper equilibrium. To the extent that they are living constantly with his design for human functioning, they will experience higher degrees of spiritual wellbeing. A psycho-theological approach to human personality, then, views the person as an integrated and integrative system with overlapping but partially distinct subsystems. From a broader systems view, the person must be understood to be part of a larger life space, or interpersonal and societal system, which also shapes and affects the functioning of the individual.

To the extent that the various subsystems are functioning harmoniously and consistently with the divine design of creation, the result is wellbeing. Although much of modern personality theory has reflected an integrative view of human nature and healthy human functioning, the naturalistic presuppositions, or closed universe view, of contemporary psychology preclude consideration of the supernatural and of the spiritual dimension of human nature. Spirit, then, does not exist, as an elementalistic entity on its own, but is integrally interwoven with the body and soul of the individual, comprising the person. If this conceptualization is correct; it ought to be possible to show positive relationships between healthy spirituality and measures of health and subjective wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is two faceted, with both vertical and horizontal components: the vertical dimension refers to our sense of wellbeing in relation to God, and the horizontal dimension refers to a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction, with no reference to anything specifically religious.[8] Hadaway[9] and Moberg[10] suggested that religion gives hope, optimism, meaning, and security to people. Watson, Morris and Hood found that grace and intrinsic religious orientation were positively related with healthy psychological qualities, and that self actualization and intrinsic religious orientation were positively correlated in a study of 250 students from a public university.[11]

---

[8] R. F. Paloutzian and C. W. Ellison, "Religious Commitment, Loneliness, and Quality of Life," *CAPS Bulletin* 5, 3 (1979), 1.

[9] C. K. Hadaway, "Life Satisfaction and Religion: A Re-analysis." *Social Forces* 57 (1978), 636-643.

[10] D. O. Moberg, *Spiritual Wellbeing*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979.

In an attempt to move toward a definition of spiritual wellbeing, the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging has suggested that spiritual wellbeing is the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates "wholeness."[12] This definition does suggest that spiritual wellbeing involves a religious and a socio-psychological component. Moberg has conceptualized spiritual wellbeing as two faceted, with both vertical and horizontal components.[13] The vertical dimension refers to our sense of wellbeing in relation to God. The horizontal dimension refers to a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction, with no reference to anything specifically religious. "To have a sense of existential wellbeing is to know what to do and why, who we are, and where we belong"[14] in relation to ultimate concerns. Both dimensions involve transcendence or a stepping back from and moving beyond what is. According to Opatz, spiritual wellness is evident in the following: "the willingness to seek meaning and purpose in human existence, to question everything, and to appreciate the intangibles which cannot be explained or understood readily. A spiritually well person seeks harmony between that which lies in the individual and the forces that come from outside the individual."[15] For Maslow, spiritual life is the highest part of our biological life as he asserted: The spiritual life, the contemplative, religious, philosophical, or value life is part of the human essence, a defining characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not full human nature. It is part of the real self of one's identity. Maslow labelled those at the top of the hierarchy as "transcendent self actualizers."[16]

---

[11] P. Watson, R. Morris, and R. Hood, "Antireligious Humanistic Values, Guilt, and Self-esteem," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1988), 535-46.

[12] National Interfaith Coalition on Aging, *Spiritual Wellbeing: A Definition*, Athens, GA: Author, 1975.

[13] Moberg, *Spiritual Wellbeing.*

[14] N. W. H. Blaikie, and G. P. Kelsen, "Locating Self and Giving Meaning to Existence: A Typology of Paths to Spiritual Wellbeing Based on New Religious Movements in Australia," in D. O. Moberg ed., *Spiritual Wellbeing: Sociological Perspectives*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979.

[15] J. P. Opatz, "Stevens Point: A Long Standing Program for Students at a Midwestern University," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 1, 1 (1986), 60-67.

Healthy spirituality can serve as a stabilising force in our lives. A dimension of spirituality involves concern and compassion for others as it frees us to become positively caring human beings. Assagioli asserted that there is a "higher consciousness" or "super consciousness" in all humans, a region of psyche from which we receive our higher intuitions and aspirations in artistic, philosophical, or scientific, ethical, imperatives and urges to humanitarian and heroic action, the source of higher feelings such as altruistic love, of genius and of higher states of contemplation, illumination and ecstasy.[17]

The term spiritual wellness can be considered as a balanced openness to, or pursuit of spiritual development. "Openness to or pursuit of" is meant to imply that spiritual wellness may be, but is not necessarily, a conscious undertaking. The expression "openness to" "addresses especially the concept of repression of the sublime,"[18] in which one denies or defies the spiritual tendency within oneself. This concept includes that of "desacrilization" whereby denial of the reality or importance of higher values defends one against the pain of disillusionment.[19] "Balanced" refers to two dimensions of spiritual wellness. The first is the horizontal dimension, characterized by a continuum with repression of the sublime at one end and spiritual emergency at the other. In spiritual emergency, one is overwhelmed by or preoccupied with spirituality, to the detriment of the other dimensions of wellness. Spiritual wellness, then, is conceptualized as a position at or near the midpoint of this continuum. As Westgate puts it, "Spiritual wellness represents the openness to the spiritual dimension that permits the integration of one's spirituality with the other dimensions of life, thus maximizing the potential for growth and self-actualization."[20] Reviewing several authors Westgate presented in a concise form, four broad dimensions of spiritual wellness: (a) meaning and purpose in life,

---

[16] A. Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, New York: Viking, 1971.

[17] R. Assagioli, *Psycho Synthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1965.

[18] F. Haronian, *Repression of the Sublime*, New York: Psycho-Synthesis Research Foundation, 1972.

[19] Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 49.

[20] C. E. Westgate, "Spiritual Wellness and Depression," *Journal of Counselling and Development* 75 (1996), 26-35.

(b) intrinsic values, (c) transcendent beliefs/experiences, and (d) community relationship.

A. Meaning and Purpose in Life: It included a sense of, or search for, meaning and purpose in life as one of the dimensions of spiritual wellness.

B. Intrinsic Values: Three of the authors reviewed referred to intrinsic values as a component of spiritual wellness. Myers, as well as Hawks, described this as a personal belief system, whereas Banks used the term "principles to live by." Hawks also used the term "ethical path." An intrinsic value system is the foundation for one's behaviour. Maslow, who claimed intrinsic values are necessary "to avoid sickness and to achieve fullest humanness,"[21] viewed an intrinsic value system as the defining characteristic of human nature.

C. Transcendent Beliefs/Experiences: A variety of terms were used to describe Transcendence. It included: an awareness and appreciation for the vastness of the universe; a recognition of a dimension "beyond the natural and rational," and an acceptance of its mystery and an element of faith, an awareness of, or belief in, a force greater than oneself, whether this be God, an infinite being or beings, or a cosmic force. Chandler and others viewed transcendence as a movement of one's "locus of centricity" from egocentricity to include healthy egocentricity, human-centricity, geo-centricity, and cosmo-centricity. Such a person views oneself to be a vital component of some larger scheme and experiences a sense of awe and wonder when considering the universe.[22]

D. Community Relationships: Community includes notions such as relationships with self, God, and others, selflessness and a desire to help others, and a love that involves working toward a greater good. Intrinsic values and a transcendent perspective naturally lead to the living and sharing of those values with others. According to Heintzman, a review done by Westgate suggested that the spiritually well person is one who experiences meaning and purpose in life and has an intrinsic value system.[23] A transcendent perspective creates recognition of the sacredness of life and of the mysteries of life and the universe. Such a person lives in community, which offers opportunities for meditating, worshipping or praying with others, in addition to a feeling of identity and shared values, mutual support, and a path for community outreach.

---

[21] Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 312.

[22] J. W. Travis, *The Wellness Index*, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1988.

In conclusion, the notions of spirituality though widely accepted differ in each philosophical, religious, or psychological school or tradition. They do not negate each other, but complement each other to provide a more complete description of both the definition of spirituality and the various means to advance in it to eventually reach a state of wellbeing. Thus, each approach though unique in concepts and methods adopted, is necessary to grasp the rich facets of the spiritual dimension of wellbeing that is universally recognized and differently understood.

3. Approaches to Enhance Spiritual Wellbeing

Several studies have been carried out in enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of young female adults. The following section enumerates the empirical studies carried out on the college students to enhance their wellbeing.

Barcus conducted a study to identify the relationship between religious commitment, spiritual wellbeing, and psychological wellbeing in college students.[24] The Spiritual Wellbeing Scale and Psychological Wellbeing Scale were administered. Frequency of church attendance was also assessed. Canonical Analysis was used to investigate the data from 425 participants to determine if there was a relationship between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. A statistically significant relationship was found between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. The following describes the nature of the relationship. First, participants who experience existential wellbeing, on the one hand, tend to be self-accepting and, on the other, have mastery of their environment and a purpose in life only to a lesser extent. Second, participants who experience existential wellbeing and to a lesser degree, religious wellbeing tend to accept themselves, have a purpose in life, possess mastery of their environment, positively relate to others, feel they are growing personally, and are autonomous. This study provided evidence of a relationship between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing.

---

[23] Paul Heintzman, "Spiritual Wellness: Theoretical Links with Leisure," *Journal of Leisurability* 26, 2 (1999).

[24] S. M. Barcus, "The Relationship between Religious Commitment, Spiritual Wellbeing and Psychological Wellbeing," *Dissertation Abstract International*: Section B, The Science and Engineering 60(3-B) (1999), 1294.

Maltby, Lewis, and Day examined the role of religious acts between measures of religious orientation and psychological wellbeing, and examined the theoretical view that religion can act as a coping mechanism.[25] Subjects (aged 18-29 years) were administered questionnaire measures of three aspects of religious orientation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest), frequency of personal prayer and church attendance, alongside measures of depressive symptoms, trait anxiety and self-esteem. Though a number of significant correlations were found between measures of religiosity and psychological wellbeing, a multiple regression analysis using identifiable religious components suggests that frequency of personal prayer is the dominant factor in the relationship between religiosity and psychological wellbeing. The results suggest two points: (1) that the correlations between a number of measures of religiosity and psychological wellbeing may be mediated by the relationship between frequency of personal prayer and psychological wellbeing; (2) that personal prayer may be an important variable to consider within the theory of religious coping.

To explore the relationship between measures of spiritual and psychological wellness and perceived wellness in a college student population, Adams and others administered a series of survey instruments to 112 undergraduate students (aged 16-58 years) under quiet classroom conditions. They used the Life Attitude Profile to measure spiritual wellness, the Life Orientation Test and the Sense of Coherence Scale to measure psychological wellness, and the Perceived Wellness Survey to measure overall wellness.[26] Path analysis performed with a proposed theoretical model revealed that the effect of life purpose on perceived wellness was mediated by optimism and a sense of coherence, which had independent effects on perceived wellness beyond that of life purpose. The findings suggest that an optimistic outlook and sense of coherence must be present for life purpose to enhance a sense of overall wellbeing.

---

[25] J. Maltby, C. A. Lewis, and L. Day, "Religious Orientation and Psychological Wellbeing: The Role of the Frequency of Personal Prayer," *British Journal of Health Psychology* 4, 4 (1999), 363.

[26] T. B. Adams, J. R. Bezner, Mary E. Drabbs, R. J. Zambarano, and Mary A. Steinhardt, "Conceptualization and Measurement of the Spiritual and Psychological Dimensions of Wellness in a College Population," *US Journal of American College Health* 48, 4 (2000), 165-173.

The interests of studying human wisdom from a psychological perspective have been a recent form of inquiry in developmental psychology. The purpose of Huang's study was to explore self-transcendence as an important aspect of oriental wisdom and to investigate its relationship with psychological wellbeing.[27] The current study identified five major dimensions of self-transcendence: Zen trait, compassion, mindfulness, emotional serenity, and content-and-simple life. Self-transcendence had positive relations with four measures of psychological wellbeing (personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and life satisfaction) and had negative relations with three measures of psychological wellbeing (anxiety, hopelessness, and depression). The middle-age group appeared to be the most self-transcendent, compared to the young and old age groups. Males and females did not differ in self-transcendence. The Buddhist group did not have higher self-transcendence than the non-Buddhist samples. Buddhist group only had higher score on the dimension of content-and-simple life than the non-Buddhist samples. People who had religious belief had higher self-transcendence than people who did not have religious belief. For those who had religious belief, the degree of religiosity did not make a difference on their self transcendence.

Gray, in his study, attempted to substantiate and augment previous findings indicating that spiritual wellbeing is positively related to reasons for living and then suggest ways of implementing these findings in intervention and therapy.[28] The Spiritual Wellbeing Scale, Reasons for Living Inventory, Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, Duke University Religion Index, and the Indiscriminate Irreligiousness Scale Pro-P Form were administered to 100 students enrolled in a private Christian graduate university. Correlation results indicated that spiritual wellbeing was strongly related to reasons for living, with the religious behavioural practice of church attendance appearing to be the most positive factor. Church attendance seems to embody both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal interpersonal relationships that comprise the two spiritual wellbeing subscales.

---

[27] B. H. Huang, "Exploring Oriental Wisdom: Self-Transcendence and Psychological Wellbeing of Adulthood in Taiwan," *Dissertation Abstracts International*: Section B, The Sciences and Engineering 61(2-B), 1111.

[28] S. Gray, "Spiritual Wellbeing and Reasons for Living: Assessing the Connections," *Dissertation Abstracts International*: Section B, The Sciences and Engineering 61 (8-B) (2001), 4405.

To sum up, the studies reviewed under this dimension of wellbeing on young male and female college students indicate that spiritual wellbeing is an important dimension of wellbeing. These studies focus on specific areas concerned with spiritual wellbeing. The review gives a direction for the present research as very few of the above studies have made an attempt to study spiritual wellbeing in relation to other significant constitutive dimensions of global wellbeing, namely the social, physical and psychological.

4. Relationship between Different Dimensions of Wellbeing

A. Psychological Wellbeing with Spiritual Wellbeing

The current study indicated that psychological wellbeing is closely related to spiritual wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is related to personal fulfilment happiness and a feeling of "sense of belonging," an affirmation that one is cared for and loved by the Divine Presence in one's life. Psychological wellbeing included meaning and purpose in life, satisfaction with oneself, self-worth and self-esteem (which are essential to one's personal happiness), as these are central to one's psychological wellbeing. In a study by Barcus it was found that those who experience existential wellbeing and religious wellbeing tend to accept themselves, have a purpose in life, possess mastery of their environment, relate positively to others, feel they are growing personally and are autonomous.[29] Ellison affirmed the Spiritual dimension does not exist in isolation from our psyche and soma, but provides an integrative force. It affects and is affected by our physical state, feelings, thoughts and relationships. If we are spiritually healthy, we will feel generally alive, purposeful and fulfilled, but only to the extent that we are psychologically healthy as well. Strategies to promote spiritual wellbeing may be directly aimed at the quality of one's relationship with God and at one is existential state.[30]

---

[29] Barcus, "The Relationship between Religious Commitment, Spiritual Wellbeing and Psychological Wellbeing."

[30] C. W. Ellison, "Spiritual Wellbeing: Conceptualization and Measurement," *Journal Psychology and Theology* 11 (1983), 332.

It is also further supported by the findings of Gray that spiritual wellbeing is strongly related to reasons for living.[31] Moreover, spiritual wellbeing is important to an overall life satisfaction. When the person is nourished with spiritual strength through the close communion with God, this strength can sustain the person through problems and difficulties and enable her/him to cope with problems and to find meaning and purpose in life without giving into disappointment or suicidal ideation. When the individual fails to anchor on to that solid spiritual foundation within oneself, she/he may fail to find meaning in personal difficulties and losses that occur in life. Absence of this faith dimension or belief and trust in the Almighty could lead to low self-worth, lack of direction, and dissatisfaction in life. Along with psychological wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing too is important as it contributes positively to sustain wellness in the individuals. The current study has yielded an affirmative correlation between psychological and spiritual wellbeing which indicates that psychological wellbeing is positively strengthened with spiritual wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing is positively strengthened with spiritual wellbeing which, in turn, is related to the global wellbeing of the subject. The current findings confirm the hypothesis that spiritual wellbeing is related to psychological wellbeing. The current study, thus, indicates that psychological wellbeing is closely related to spiritual wellbeing. Personal fulfilment and happiness, and an affirmation that one is cared for and loved by the Divine Presence in her/his life increase a person's wellness. When the person is in close communion with God it increases the person's satisfaction with oneself and she/he comes to possess meaning and purpose in life. The negative trend, i.e., God being not a part of an individual's life is found to be related to lack of self-worth, presence of suicidal ideas and absence of personal control.

B. Spiritual Wellbeing with Social Wellbeing

Spiritual wellbeing includes the individual's closeness with God and the comfort, peace, happiness, and meaning derived from such a communion with God. Existential wellbeing deals, on the one hand, with the individual's meaning and purpose in life and the direction the individual's life has taken and, on the other, dissatisfaction with life, unsettled about the future, and finding no meaning and purpose in life. It has been found that spiritual wellbeing, existential wellbeing, and religious wellbeing are related to social wellbeing. The relationship the person has with God, the communion and the closeness experienced with God enables the person to have healthy interpersonal relationships with others. The spiritual strength experienced or the peace, solace, joy, serenity, love, care, understanding, satisfaction, and meaning found with the closeness to God allows the individual to extend this joy, peace, love, care, and understanding to others, i.e., to family, friends, neighbours and people in general. Relationship with God leads to relationship with humanity. The peace and serenity experienced within are emanated outward.

---

[31] Gray, "Spiritual Wellbeing and Reasons for Living."

The existential wellbeing scale measures the meaning and purpose of one's existence. When individuals experience that their life is coherent and meaningful, and finds fulfilment in life, it leads to meaningful and satisfying relationships with others. An individual can find personal fulfilment in life only in relation with others as others influence their wellbeing. When the individuals fail to accept the things they cannot change, when confronted with difficulties and problems in life it is to this inner source that they turn to find strength, meaning, and purpose. It is this inner source, the transcendent self that instils hope and strength in the individual to enhance one's own social wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is related to social wellbeing because it helps to sustain and maintain interpersonal relationships; it generates peace and love in individuals enabling them to reach out to the members of family, friends, and others to lend and to receive support.

C. Spiritual Wellbeing and Body Image

A woman's body image encompasses her physical appearance, size and shape, and is formed out of every experience a person has ever had – through parents, role models, and peers who give an idea as to what it is like to love and value a body. The image is formed from the positive and negative feedbacks from people whose opinions matter. It also is determined by the ways a person herself has perceived her body to fit or not fit within the cultural image. Adolescents girls often strive to adopt socially accepted feminine qualities: compliance, taking care of others, and of course, looking good. Since a woman's sense of self is so influenced by how she sees herself in relationships, she puts extra effort in trying to be the person she thinks others want her to be. Society also portrays cultural ideals in the media and in the clothing and cosmetic industry which set a standard that leaves most young female adults feeling inadequate and unsatisfied, quite unaware that society and, especially, the media portray an image of women that is both unrealistic and potentially unhealthy. Body image involves perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of bodies. It is not static, but ever changing, sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. More than being based on fact, it is psychological in nature and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is learned, not inborn. What is learned and expected culturally is reinforced by learning that occurs in the family and among peers.[32]

In the present study it has been found that spiritual wellbeing and body image are related to each other. Both these, in turn, are also found to be related to global wellness of the subjects. Spiritual wellbeing deals with the individual's satisfaction with life, finding meaning and purpose in one's existence. Spiritual wellbeing also consists of the individual's closeness with God and the comfort, joy and peace derived from a communion with God. People who have scored high on their spiritual dimension of wellbeing indicate that they are also high on their existential wellbeing which implies that they are happy with themselves, with their life, and the direction their life is headed for. The current study indicates that body image, with special reference to satisfaction with the appearance of body parts, is related to spiritual wellbeing. The measure on body image was to indicate if the individual is satisfied or not with reference to one's various body parts. The correlation found between these two dimensions of spiritual wellbeing and body image could be enhancing because when the individual is certain that God loves, cares, and is concerned about one's life and existence, it could foster a positive image of one's body which God has created. The correlation could also imply that when the individual finds satisfaction with life and meets success, finds achievement and experiences contentment in one's personal life, she may also find it natural to accept her body as it is and may not harbour negative feelings about it. Existential wellbeing depends on how an individual perceives and accepts life and rates one's present life as a meaningful one or not. It also indicates the person's satisfaction in her personal life and her hopefulness for the future. The individuals, who have found their priorities or concerns in things that matter to them, may not give into disappointment of their body and its appearance. Their sense of wellbeing may also contribute towards their positive body image.

---

[32] J. Lightstone, "Index Archives Body Image," http://www.Psychotherapist.org /Index/archivesbodyimage.htm 78, (2002).

5. Enhancement Techniques for Spiritual Wellbeing

Spiritual dimension forms one's core, one's centre and it consists of one's commitments to one's value system. It draws upon the sources that inspire, uplift, and tie every person to the timeless truths of all humanity. The exercises in this section help the subjects to retrospect their spiritual journeys and to relive their spiritual sources right from childhood. The subjects are assisted to reflect on areas of life where the divine presence is present or absent. The exercises lead the participants to the "Realm of Wellness" which is the centre of one's life and to experience the divine presence in this inner sanctuary. The exercises also enable the participants to learn to forgive and to settle the issues that inwardly conflict, so as to experience serenity and peace within them.

A. "Reliving Sacred Moments"

Meditation is conducted to help the participants to get in touch with their spiritual life. They are guided to retrospect their spiritual journey. They recall their special prayers, their festivals, moments of deep prayer, and favourite strings of prayer or *mantras*, and the God images they hold. They write down the experience. They share in pairs and in the groups their deep spiritual experiences (if they have experienced them). To enhance their spiritual wellbeing gradually, they recall their spiritual experiences, especially as the past has an effect on the present experiences. The participants are made to get in touch with the different aspects of their spiritual life, to help them to reflect its significance, and to deepen these experiences of their childhood. Sharing is done, as it helps the participants to listen to one another and be enriched by the deep spiritual experiences of one another.

B. "Communion with the Divine and Humanity"

The participants are led by the researcher to enter into their own interior and to recall the times they have experienced the presence of the divine in their daily interactions and the times they have failed to share with others compassion, love, peace, and security which flow from the experience of the divine presence. An attempt is made through this exercise to help the participants to reflect on the areas of their lives where the divine presence is felt and the areas where this presence is not shared by the individual to others.

C. "Let Only Love Surround"

They are led through an exercise to surround those people in their lives with love, respect, and honour (the members of their family and others). Through this exercise the participants are helped to allow the goodness which the divine presence offers to flow to all the areas of their lives and vibrate to others.

D. "Accessing the Core"

The researcher led the participants through a breathing exercise, then gently to get in touch with their depth, the core of their selves where only that which is pure, good, divine love dwells (unconditional love, positive goodness, sacred space, or inner sanctuary). Input is given by the researcher as to access the core within oneself and to savour the goodness that resides therein. This exercise helps the participants to get in touch with the core, and to experience the peace and joy the divine presence offers when one turns to this power in quietness and humble disposition.

E. "Forgiveness Flows from Me to You"

The exercise on "forgiveness and love" is an attempt to help the individuals to learn and experience the art of forgiving one another. With an input session on forgiveness, they are gradually enabled to send out vibrations of peace and love to their families and everyone around them.

6. Effects of Multidimensional Wellbeing

The present research was aimed at studying the multidimensional aspects of wellbeing in young female adults with a view to enhance their wellbeing. The study focused specially upon the psychological, spiritual, social, and physical aspects of wellbeing of young female adults, and to analyse its relation with an intervention programme (some samples given in the previous section) conducted to enhance wellbeing. It had the basic assumption after Cushman: "To have high levels of wellbeing is to be flourishing in life, to be flourishing, then, is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially."[33]

According to Ellison, in whichever level or degree one is in the experience of spiritual wellbeing, it can be further enhanced. Ellison stated: "Spiritual wellbeing should be seen as a continuous variable, rather than as dichotomous. It is not a matter of whether or not we have it. Rather, it is question of how much and how we may enhance the degree of spiritual wellbeing that we have."[34] With this view in mind, the subjects with low scores on spiritual wellbeing were subjected to the intervention programme to enhance their spiritual wellness to a higher level which would assist them to find meaning and purpose in life and to affirm their life in relationship with God, oneself, and community. In view of enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of young female adults various exercises were conducted. They were "Reliving Sacred Moments," "Communion with the Divine and Humanity," "Let only Love Surround," "Accessing the Core," "Peace *Mantras*," "Forgiveness Flows," "Grounding," and "Synthesizing." The intervention programme aimed at enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of the subjects, once the sessions on psychological wellbeing were completed, as psychological development is the first stage of spiritual development and the establishment of psychological health is the first task of spiritual life in Buddhist psychology. Advayacitta is also of the view that spiritual development is dependent upon prior psychological health as psychological wellbeing is the fundamental component of global wellbeing.[35] Several techniques have been used by researchers in enhancing the spiritual dimensions of wellbeing. Gawain is of the opinion that growth in spiritual dimensions is stimulated by intentional activity.[36] Persons working with meditation and creative visualization experience enhanced spiritual wellness. Among the guidelines suggested by Borysenko for minding the body and mending the mind in order to cope with the daily stress and to sustain wellness, are increasing experience of positive wholeness generating feelings, practicing the quieting of mind body organism deeply through the process of meditation, telling oneself

---

[33] P. Cushman, "Why the Self is Empty: Toward a Historically Situated Psychology," *American Psychologist* 45 (1990), 599-611.

[34] Ellison, "Spiritual Wellbeing," 332.

[35] I. Advayacitta, *Buddhism and Psychotherapy (A Buddhist Perspective): The Impact of Eastern Religion on Psychological Theory and Practice*, London: Wisdom Publication, 1986, 153- 172.

[36] S. Gawain, *Creative Visualisation*, New York: Bantam Books, 1982.

"this too shall pass," etc.[37] The sessions of this intervention programme were designed to help the subjects to experience peace, joy, serenity, and the divine presence within. The spiritual wellbeing of the subjects was enhanced with a programme designed to awaken the spiritual dimension of wellbeing in the subjects at varying levels. In "Reliving the Sacred Moments," for example, the subjects were guided in the exercise to integrate their God images into the current stage of life. The subjects expressed their trust and faith in God, as a result of which meaning and purpose of their life were transformed, especially in perceiving God as a very loving person who cares for every human person.

The findings are in line with Tisdale and others who pointed to God image as a positive extraneous variable that affected both psychological wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing.[38] Also, Richter has stressed the view of many researchers that God image closely fostered self-esteem and self-image and these, in turn, appeared to affect religious experience and empathy.[39] The subjects in the study seem to have emerged with a deeper experience of God as a loving person who is interested in their wellbeing. The current findings support the observation of Richter who has in his study found that majority of the subjects viewed God in a positive and loving perspective. During the exercise on "God Images," the subjects reported serenity and peace in encountering the Divine within themselves: "We felt as if God was so close to us," is one of the opinions. According to the findings of Pollner, the substance of the image of the Divine would seem to affect the impact of a divine relation on wellbeing.[40] He further stated that the effects of divine relations suggest that divine relations may both foster and reflect a positive framing of all events and discern the positive, benevolent, and promising aspects of self, others and the world.

---

[37] J. Borysenko, *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, New York: Bantam Books, 1987.

[38] T. C. Tisdale, T. L. Key, K. J. Edwards, Brokaw B. Fletcher, S. R. Kemperman, H. Cloud, J. Townsend, and T. Okamoto, "Impact of Treatment on God Image and Personal Adjustment and Correlations of God Image to Personal Adjustment and Object Relations Development," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25 (Fall 1997), 227-239.

[39] Rachel J. Richter, "Correlation of Psychological Wellbeing and Christian Spiritual Wellbeing at a Small Christian Liberal Arts College in the Urban Midwest," Paper Presented at the First Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium Held at Wisconsin Lutheran College, 2001.

[40] M. Pollner, "Divine Relations, Social Relations and Wellbeing," *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 30 (1989), 92-104.

The subjects reported that at the end of the spiritual wellbeing exercises, they were left with an experience of connectedness because of the exercise on "Communion with the Divine and Humanity." They expressed that they felt a sense of closeness with family, friends, and with everyone who were present in the room. The subjects were also particularly overwhelmed by the exercise on "Let Love Surround," where they had to bring in all the people who are difficult to relate to and to hold them in their heart and to surround them with love and kindness. The subjects felt the inner strength within them in the presence of the Divine to allow love and kindness to reach out to others.

It is noticed that the themes of compassion, selflessness, integrity, honesty, and connectedness with others emerge as vital dimensions of spirituality. The subjects reported that they were left with an experience of connectedness after the exercise on "Communion with the Divine and Humanity," as they were guided to believe that God is personally interested in them and, therefore, to personally experience the presence of the Divine and, later, to share their peace and harmony with everyone. The meditation on "Accessing the Core," the inner sanctuary where only peace, harmony, and divinity exist led the subjects to a deeper experience of themselves. The current findings correspond to Hawks who asserted that once faith, hope, and commitment are in place, pursuit of meaning and purpose can lead to personal fulfilment, self-esteem, and connectedness with others.[41] The subjects expressed that they experienced closeness with themselves and felt enthused and strengthened with this affirmation of the divine presence within themselves and experienced kindness and affection towards others. Reece and Brandt have stated that healthy spirituality could bring a higher degree of harmony and wholeness to our lives and move us beyond self-centeredness.[42] Healthy spirituality can serve as a stabilizing force in our lives. A dimension of spirituality involves concern and compassion for others as it frees us to become positively caring human beings. Divine interaction may also bolster individual self-esteem and self-efficacy. Pollner further suggests that interaction may enhance perceived wellbeing by deepening the sense of orderliness and predictability of events and by investing problematic solutions with new religious meaning.[43]

---

[41] S. Hawks, "Spiritual Health: Definition and Theory," *Wellness Perspectives* 10, 4 (1994).

[42] B. L. Reece and R. Brandt, *Human Relations: Principles and Practices*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

The subjects were particularly touched by the exercise on "Forgiveness and Love." This exercise was designed to help the participants to learn and experience the art of forgiving one another. They expressed that the exercise had helped them to forgive the past hurts caused by the members of family and friends and to build healthy relationships with them. "Forgiveness and Love" fosters the overall wellbeing of the individuals. The results of the subjects who were exposed to this intervention programme emerged highly significant on the measure of spiritual wellbeing both in the post and follow up assessment stages indicating its effectiveness. The participants shared their God experiences (significant experience in spiritual life) after the input sessions and the spiritual exercises. In this sharing, the subjects expressed their trust and faith in God, and the meaning and purpose of their lives. The participants reported the experience of serenity and peace within themselves. They reflected upon different areas of their lives, where the divine presence was experienced as the presence of peace, love, harmony, forgiveness, and kindness. They experienced God as a loving person who cares for every human person.

7. Conclusion

Finally, the research has drawn the conclusion that spiritual health is the source of all other dimensions and that spirituality is the overarching umbrella covering all of the other aspects of health, representing the essence of who and what the individual is.[44] The intervention programme clearly indicates that spiritual wellness is a central component of wellbeing and that it affects all other dimensions of wellbeing. Moreover, it helps to frame all situations in positive terms and to acquire healthy-mindedness and, thus, to enjoy wellbeing. The findings indicate that the exercises and the input sessions which were given to the subjects during the intervention programme to enhance spiritual wellbeing had left them with deeper experience of God, who is the creator and the guiding force of all human beings. Intervention programme to enhance spiritual wellbeing had a positive impact on all other dimensions of wellbeing.

---

[43] Pollner, "Divine Relations, Social Relations and Wellbeing," 92-104.

[44] C. A. Kolander and C. K. Chandler, "Spiritual Health: A Balance of All Dimensions," Paper Presented at the Meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, New Orleans, LA, 1990.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 225-232

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Antony Puthenangady[◆]

1. Introduction

The destruction, on December 6, 1992, of a mosque of the early Mughal period at Ayodhya, one of the most Hindu holy cities had sent shock waves not only across India and her neighbouring Muslim countries of Bangladesh and Pakistan, but even to the far away countries. It gave the impression to other countries that India abandoned or was about to abandon secularism, one of the most progressive features of the modern India. The tragedy at Ayodhya came as the climax of a long campaign on the part of a major political formation to incite religious sentiments to gain political ascendancy. The Country's intellectual elite felt deep sorrow and asked the question where would the tendency to exploit religious sentiment and religious symbols for political ends lead India? The destruction of World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 was another shock not only to United States of America but to the whole world. A perceived shock arose from a realization that no country is safe from the hands of fighting fundamentalists. Everybody was raising the concern over the consequences of recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These events affect the internal harmony and the external security of every nation. What is behind all these is a mixture of religious bigotry and political opportunism.

2. Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism has been associated with a closed and dogmatic personality type, with exclusivism, particularism, liberalism, and moral

---

[◆] **Dr. Antony Puthenangady** cmi, a much sought after professional counsellor, holds a Master's Degree in Guidance and Counselling and a Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology (Clinical). Apart from being the director of a Master's Programme in "Formative Spirituality and Counselling" at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, he offers psychology and counselling related courses at various institutes and colleges.

rigourism.[1] Fundamentalism stands in opposition to religious and cultural liberalism and in defence of orthodoxy and tradition. It may refer to an approach to interpreting Scripture that accepts it without question as absolute authority, leaving no room for taking into account changed circumstances or possible error. Religious fundamentalism may be said to be the exaggeration of a religious tradition. This leads to the use of the ideational component or religion, which is basically a faith expression, as the basis or rationale for a sort of "closed circuit" ideological system. This process is facilitated because religion is susceptible to easy and expedient politicization. According to Stella Balthazar,

> Fundamentalism implies a belief held by a group of people who have the power and the facility to impose, project their beliefs on others and control them with an ulterior personal motive which negates and denies access to such facilities and information to a section of people in its own circle or outside of it. When a group uses the name of God in doing this, it becomes religious fundamentalism.[2]

There is the common concern about the 'misuse' of religion in public life, in the name of a return to the basic or original core of a religion. This threatened return could be historical; it could be textual. In the first case, the fear is absolutisation and closure of a faith through historicism; in the second, through literality. In both situations, fundamentalism has come to mean something terribly dangerous, unmanageable, intolerant, and narrow-minded.

Economic factors also play an important role in the fundamentalist reaction. In a situation where resources are scarce, people use religion or communal grouping as the focal point for their organized fight for their share. The fight becomes intense when the resources become scarce, or one group finds itself alienated from the mainstream, or is losing in the game. What we experience today is a kind of political process in which regional and alienated groups are struggling for their share. No one seems to be succeeding and there is constant rivalry, and clashes born out of disappointment.

---

[1] Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, "Fundamentalism" by William Dinges, 411.

[2] Stella Balthazar, "Religious Fundamentalism: A Feminist Perspective," *Religious Fundamentalism: An Asian Perspective*, ed. John S. Augustine, Bangalore: South Asia Theological Research Institute, 1993, 97.

But in the present conflicts triggered off by fundamentalist groups, the poor are being used as pawns and the benefit goes to the powerful in each group. They instigate the caste or communal feelings in order that they may continue their dominance and power.

3. Religion

The word religion itself is a transliteration of the Latin word *religio* meaning to bind, to bind fast, or to fasten up. It is defined as reverence for God, or gods, or the fear of God. Religion could perhaps be best defined as a human attempt to achieve the highest possible good by adjusting life to the strongest and the best power in the universe. This power they usually call God. According to Gordon W. Allport, "A man's religion is the audacious bid he makes to bind himself to creation and to the creator. It is his ultimate attempt to enlarge and to complete his own personality by finding the supreme context in which he rightly belongs."[3] To Jesus, the heart of religion is the inner spirit, and he constantly turns from external to desires and motives, affections and thoughts, that become the decisive issues of life. Murder begins in anger, adultery stems from lust, profanity from irreverence and insincerity, enmity from selfishness and hatred. In confronting his accusers and wrestling with crucial decisions, he brings into bold belief the power of love devoted to God in eternal perspective.

Towards the end of his life, Vivekananda dreamt that Goddess Kali was asking him: Do you defend me or do I defend you? Vivekananda drew the right lessons from the dream; his admirers do not. They continue to desperately defend their faiths outside because they have already lost much of it within. Karl Marx, in his indictment of religion, had considered "religion as the opiate of the people." He had also made a profound observation that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. As the oldest form of logic, popular religion expresses the first stammering efforts of mankind to rationalize existence."[4] It appears to me that our people seem to have enough religion to hate one another, but not enough to love one another! Mahatma Gandhi had acknowledged that "undoubtedly, some of the worst crimes in world history had been committed in the name of religion."[5] However, Gandhi explained that this unfortunate aspect of religion seemed to be "not the fault of religion itself, but was due to the presence of the brute in the human being."[6]

---

[3] Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1950, 142.

[4] *Deccan Herald*, Tuesday, October 4, 2005, 9.

The seeds of fundamentalism lie in the perversion of the concept of God Almighty. A god who is himself greedy, a god who is seething with anger, lust and pride, a god who is seated in some imaginary terrestrial heaven and occasionally stoops down to the level of the mortals but retains his power to perform miracles and performs them to overawe the people into meek submission, these and all other related attributes of God have played havoc with each one of our world religions and filled them to the brim with the potential for fundamentalism.[7]

Various manifestations of religious fundamentalism have become a global phenomenon, and in Asia, especially, they threaten the inherent plurality of the socio-cultural fabric. Religious fundamentalism is manifest in all the major religions including Christianity. It is, therefore, necessary to initially understand the phenomenon *per se* and, then, to be properly aware of, and make an adequate response to it. There is a common saying that nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. "Nothing will divide the Church so much as the love of power," said St. Chrysostom.[8] For, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

4. The Psychology and Psychopathology behind Fundamentalism

When visiting the Niagra Falls, a man inquired of a bystander, "What's that house down there?" "The power house. From it wires go to all the houses giving them the needed electricity." "Where does all that power come from?" "Well, lake Erie is 169 feet below lake Ontario. The fall of the water provides the power. If they were at the same level, there would be no power." The above conversation explains the whole psychology of dominance, a basic mental attitude behind the fundamentalism for personal gain.

---

[5] *Deccan Herald*, Tuesday, October 4, 2005, 9

[6] *Deccan Herald*, Tuesday, October 4, 2005, 9.

[7] Swami Agnivesh, "An Activist View," *Religious Fundamentalism: An Asian Perspective*, ed. John S. Augustine, Bangalore: South Asia Theological Institute, 1993, 28.

[8] Chrysostom, cited in Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book*, Bangalore: ATC, 1997, 292.

Sigmund Freud in his essay "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (1907) suggested that religious ideas as illusions springing from the infantile desires of the believer for protection from harshness of reality. His approach to religion was reductionist; religion represented a transitional stage that humanity was passing through on its way to full maturity. The notion of God had its roots in the young boy's experience with his natural father and humanity's experience with a primal tyrant who was both loved and feared.[9] Carl Gustav Jung saw religion as beneficial to humanity because it kept humanity in touch with the unconscious. Jung detailed a process of individuation which occurred in adulthood and led a person to befriend the unconscious and discover the true self. For Jung, Christ was a symbol of this full self and passion of Jesus a model of the individuation process. Erik H. Erikson, in his famous work, *Young Man Luther* (1958), applying his theory of psychosocial development, noted how a religious person like Luther comes to discover who he is in the light of a Transcendent Other. For Erikson, Crisis is a turning point that occurs in every stage of life. In the very first of these crises – the crisis of infancy – trust vs. mistrust, the growing infant is introduced to trust in God through the hands of a benevolent mother/caretaker. Gordon Allport wrote in some detail about a religious sentiment and differentiated immature religion which he saw as magical, wish-fulfilling, and self-centred from a mature religion that was dynamic and critical.[10] Abraham Maslaw studied self actualizing people and the 'peak-experiences' which they enjoyed. For him peak-experience, which he identified with mystical experience, was the primary element in religion. Through such experience one gained a vision of transcendent reality.

It was Alfred Adler (1870-1937) who brought the concept of striving for superiority. Adler maintained that all people begin life with a sense of inferiority. This perception is to be expected from the weak and helpless child who is surrounded by and dependent for survival on larger and stronger adults. This perception of inferiority marks the beginning of a lifelong struggle to overcome such feelings of inferiority, which Adler called "*striving for superiority*." Adler says: "I began to see clearly in every psychological phenomenon, the striving for superiority. It runs parallel to physical growth and is an intrinsic necessity of life style. It lies at the root of all solutions of life's problems and is manifested in the way in which we meet those problems. All our functions follow its direction."[11] Thus, for Adler, virtually everything we do is aimed at overcoming feelings of inferiority and in establishing a sense of superiority. Adler believed that a well adjusted person expresses the striving for superiority through concern for the social interest. Poorly adjusted persons might develop an inferiority complex leading to superiority complex expressed as extreme discouragement, continuous hesitation, over sensitivity, impatience, anger, aggression, and constant retreat.

---

[9] Sigmund Freud, *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices*, In Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmond Frued, James Strachy ed., London: Hogarth Press, 1959, vol.9, 115-127.

[10] Gordon Allport, *Individual and His Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1950.

According to Psychoanalytic Approach, aggression was seen as part of the *libido*, the pleasure seeking drive that stimulated psychosexual development. However, Freud (1920, 1923) later redefined his thinking on aggression and identified it as a separate instinct – '*thanatos*', the powerful death instinct. The individual was seen as a being driven by two competing biological mechanisms, a life instinct (*Eros*) and a death instinct (*Thanatos*). The death instinct, according to Freud, drove the individual to strive for personal obliteration and ran contrary to the life instinct. Although this self-destructive instinct could be controlled (usually through the ego) it could not be completely eliminated and, therefore, Freud visualized defence mechanisms as central to dealing with the *libido*, manifesting as sadism and/masochism; it could be displaced on to others resulting in aggression/violence. In psychoanalytic terms, then, aggression is seen as inevitable, an instinct that builds up and requires some type of outlet. It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other things or persons in order not to destroy ourselves, or to guard against the impulse of self-destruction.[12] This explains well the aggressive and destructive tendencies seen very much in fundamentalist movements.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), who himself suffered much emotional distress, thought of emotional disorder under the concept of despair, which he called "sickness unto death." He saw despair as being self-rejection due to imbalances between self's awareness of finitude and infinitude or despair of spirit or self in terms of the polarity between possibility and necessity or the polarity between consciousness and unconsciousness. These three polarities – off balance – are the source of pathological expressions of religion. On balance, they are the source of health.[13]

---

[11] Adler, cited in Ansbacher and Ansbacher, New York: Basic Books, 1956, 103.

[12] Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, London: Hogarth Press, 1933, 588.

Religion participates as causative factor in mental illness when punitive forms of religion are used as a means of controlling the person. Religion participates in emotional disorder when it is a religion of nostalgia that ties a person to the past. Religion becomes a cause for sickness when it is the vehicle of maintaining a constricted territory for a growing person leading to constricted consciousness. Religion brings in maladapted behaviour in a person when in the name of religion a person is encouraged to avoid the developmental tasks of life and to refuse to make the great transitions of life. Religion participates malignantly in mental disorders when a person persistently shifts blame to others, refuses to forgive others, to accept their humanity, refuses to accept responsibility for one's own actions, and organizes his/her life around a permanent sense of unforgiveness. For mentally ill persons, religion becomes the last-straw to hold on to before he/she collapses emotionally.

5. Conclusion

Fundamentally, indeed, every religion is a religion of love for all those whom it embraces; however, cruelty and intolerance toward those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion.[14] Gordon Allport defines the developed religious sentiment in terms of a "comprehensive attitude whose function is to relate the individual meaningfully to the whole being."[15] It is a kenotic – or self-emptying – approach which alone will save the present situation. The person who is the agent of change must be ready to sacrifice or renounce his/her own prerogative by reason of rank, office, or point of view. This enables everyone to see for a time the inner world view and perspective of the other person. Then, the other person becomes a Thou to whom to be related, to be understood, to be known and to be loved. When conflicts or polarities arise between inner self and the outer self, oneself and the other, finite and the infinite, one's own will and the will of the other, consciousness and unconscious within the personality in defence of these polarities, one begins to wear the masks and builds up a false identity. Ann Morrow Lindberg writes: "I find I am shedding hypocrisy in human relationships. What a rest that will be! The most exhausting thing in life, I have discovered, is being insincere. That is why so much of social life is exhausting; one is wearing a mask. I have shed my mask."[16] Gandhi explained that the unfortunate aspect of religion seemed to be "not the fault of religion itself but was due to the presence of brute in the human person."[17]

---

[13] Wayne E. Oates, *The Psychology of Religion*, Texas: Word Books, 1981, 264-266.

[14] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego*, London: Hogarth Press, 1948, 43, 51.

[15] Gordon W. Allport, *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955, 94.

It is essential to treat fundamentalists with respect and love. They must be approached on the level of doctrine because they remain fixed on some doctrines, enjoy their name, power, and influence because of these doctrines. They believe that God's salvation depends on accepting the truth in its entirety in all its consequences. If we want to fight fundamentalism, rescue first the fundamentals of God. We need to realize that Truth is God, Love is God and compassion is God. This goes beyond saying God is truth, love and compassion. Save God from the fundamentalist Big Bulls who reduced religion to a bundle of rituals, beliefs, and a source of corrupt business and power. It is a long journey – a journey against strong currents of cravings and aversions. We are all being swept off our feet by the onslaught of a consumer culture, by a materialistic world-view, by the avalanche of a superficial lifestyle which is at once sapping the warmth of fellow human feelings. If we believe that we need to answer fundamentalism, we will have to begin from ourselves experiencing within the peace and joy of oneness. This is a self-emptying journey towards martyrdom. Socrates prayed:

"O Lord, give me beauty in the inner soul!
And may the outward man and the inward man be at one."

---

[16] Anne Morrow Lindberg, *Gift from the Sea*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1955, 32.

[17] *Deccan Herald*, Tuesday, October 4, 2005, 9.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 233-246

RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND IDENTITY AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN HINDU WOMEN

Maheshvari Naidu◆

1. Introduction

The year 1860 is a significant year in the consciousness of any South African Indian. This is the year that saw the arrival of Indians from India, to South Africa. They arrived as indentured labourers to act as cheap labour for the English farmers who had found the African labourer unpredictable and sought alternate cheap labour. Here then would have been a transaction involving two colonies of the British Empire. From 1860 to 1911 or the length of the entire period of indentured immigrants, about 26,926 women were brought to South Africa.[1]

This article looks at the arrival of the Indian woman as indentured labourer and attempts to examine some aspects of her early articulation of a religious identity within the historical context of migration and displacement. The article asserts that through memory and recall the Hindu woman in South Africa has reconstructed her religious identity by endeavouring to replicate certain ritualistic observances. The particular history of this experience of women has been muted by her absence (in a religious sense) in the documented (local) literature, which subsumed her presence within the wider generic of the early Indian experience. We look particularly at the South Indian Tamil speaking woman in South Africa and at her relationship to the goddess Māriammen and unpack the role this goddess is supposed to play in her life.

2. A Religious Identity

The construction of a religious identity calls into the arena of most, although not all, traditions another thespian, an actor or actress in the guise of a god or goddess. It brings to the performance particular understandings

---

◆**Dr. Maheshvari Naidu** is a lecturer in the School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa.

[1] P. Brijbal, "Demographic Profile" in A. J. Arkin, K.P. Magyar, and G. J. Pillay eds., *The Indian South Africans: A Contemporary Profile*, South Africa: Owen Burgess Publishers, 1986, 25-26.

of the world and your place in that world. It is, of course, overly simplistic to claim that in some ways you are born with the script, in that you are born into a religious tradition. Of consequence is also how you choose to interpret and act out that script, whose text might lend itself to multiple readings and might well undergo various shades of slight to severe change when played to a new audience and in a new venue.

This new venue was to be South Africa. Writing in the year 2000 approximately 140 years after the first Hindu stepped onto African soil, Pratap Kumar writes of South Africa:

> South Africa is a land of cultural diversity. It is one of the most cross-culturally rich and powerful countries. One could take a walk through the main streets of Downtown Durban [in Natal] and feel the profound reshaping of Western and Eastern cultures in the crucible of an African ethos. One is simultaneously passing through a multidimensional worldview.
>
> It is the in the context of this multidimensional worldview that one has to understand the uniquely reshaped Hindu culture outside of its original home India.[2]

This is some 140 years down the historical time line. That is not to say that I am not able to echo his rather evocative description of multicultural and religiously plural South Africa and the Hindu's place in this land. Nelson Mandela's by now somewhat clichéd term 'Rainbow Nation' is itself a mirror of this sentiment. Pratap Kumar does a good job of reconstructing the life-world of the Hindu in South Africa; to a lesser extent do other authors who have focused on particular Hindu religious movements or Hindu religious festivals. These authors though have not had as their foci the Hindu woman or more specifically the early indentured Hindu woman who would have contributed to this uniquely reshaped Hindu culture and multidimensional worldview. The exception to this is the scholar Alleyn Diesel, whose articles,[3] and earlier unpublished doctoral thesis (1998), looked at contemporary goddess worship practices as symbols of empowerment for South African Hindu women.

---

[2] Pratap Kumar, *Hinduism in South Africa*. South Africa: University of Durban-Westville, 2000, 1.

[3] Alleyn Diesel, "The Suffering Mothers: The Hindu Amman Goddesses as Empowering Role Models for Women," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15, 1 (2002).

3. Invisibility of the Hindu Women in the Literature

There has been much written in South African literature about South African Indians and their relationship to the liberation struggle and their provoked political consciousness in the wake of the arrival of Gandhi in 1893. There has also been a fairly substantial, although not exhaustive, amount written on Indian and Hindu women and their contribution to the political struggle against Apartheid.

There is however, a paucity of information about the early history of the indentured Hindu women. The experiences of these women have been subsumed within the broader context of the Indian experience. While this may not be a deliberate androcentric bias in scholarship, it nevertheless contributes to their (the women's) invisibility and feeds into furthering academia that has in the past largely preferred to focus scholarship on the generic man. Like in many other areas there is, thus, an urgent need to recover the indentured Hindu women's experience as an integral player in the particular trajectory of the history of Hinduism in South Africa.

Historical and archival material are seen to deal and converse with the social reality of the early indentured Indians as a whole. The most perfunctory of looks at Pratap Kumar's bibliography is testimony to this fact. For, in his book on Hinduism in South Africa it appears that a large part of his research was culled out from books about the history of the indentured and the later category of merchant Indians. His own empirical research, in turn, focused more directly on the Hindu Indians.

Of the religion of the Hindus in South Africa there exist, thus, Pratap Kumar's book and some other published studies, several of them having been initiated as doctoral research projects on one or other Neo-Hindu religious organisation in this country. There exist also unpublished Masters level studies that deal with one or other aspect of Hinduism in South Africa, usually a North Indian or South Indian religious festival as it comes to be experienced in South Africa. However, this has been on the period, subsequent to the arrival of neo- or reformed Hinduism that sought, with its philosophical inclination, to move away from the ritual based Hinduism. Furthermore there is almost nothing in written form about the early Hindu woman arriving in South Africa, even by women researchers.

In a bid for a more authentic and gender inclusive narrative I have attempted to reconstruct her religious and ritual behaviour based on interviews and the recall and memory of what would now be the granddaughters of the early woman. This I perceived as a vital research window into the early life world of the Hindu woman.

I chose to interview women from the Tamil speaking South Indian community as the observance of the Māriammen prayer (worship to the goddess Māriammen) happens within the Tamil speaking community. I have also conducted informal interviews with female devotees attending the Māriammen Festival, observed in the month of July in the Māriammen Temple in Mount Edgecombe.

The women I spoke with were all over fifty years old, some as old as seventy. The women were all of similar economic background. The educational backgrounds were also similar in that they were all not very well educated and some were not literate at all. This sample configuration was important as I wished to hear from women who would have not attempted to reanalyse their memories or ritual activities in the light of more recent philosophical religious inclinations but rather share the narratives as descriptions free of such appended meanings.

These women all had fairly clear memories of the religious practices regarding the Māriammen prayer of their mothers and, more vitally of their grandmothers. Retrospectively, they were, thus, valuable conduits of information. Notwithstanding the fact that the number of families performing the prayer was decreasing – either because the younger members of the families have moved away from this particular kind of ritual where slaughter of animals was involved or because they have converted to Christianity – many families continue to perform the prayer. These women interviewed were also respondents in their own right because they continued and perpetuated, as a matter of tradition, much of the ritual observances of their grandmothers.

Historical records reveal that the early Hindu woman who travelled from India would have come from the rural parts of mainly South India, from places like Madras and Calcutta and the surrounding districts. We see that she arrived in small numbers relative to the large numbers of her male counterpart.

Coming from the rural villages and semi-rural small towns or the depressed economic peripheries of the urban areas the Hindu woman was illiterate and came with a particular understanding of her religion. She brought with her what historians of religion working with Hindu materials would refer to as non-Brahmanical or what anthropologists have termed as indigenous folk religion. At the fore of this type of religion was goddess worship.

4. The Goddess in India

In the context of indigenous Hinduism or village Hinduism practised in India, each village is associated with a particular protective mother goddess. This goddess connotes in very real terms the stability and order of the village and the villagers. She is synonymous with the wellbeing of all who reside in that particular village. Indeed, the tradition teaches that she is 'married' to the village as a whole and, thus, the villagers' welfare is her primary concern.

Kumar notes that in India the goddess Māriammen is associated with smallpox, cholera and other contagious diseases. The goddess is seen as being the causative element in both the processes of sickness as well as healing.[4] Māriammen, like all the other Hindu goddesses in the folk tradition, is feared and revered at the same time. I had occasion to experience this sense of fear of the goddess while doing fieldwork in India, compiling a tape recording of the devotees attending Māriammen festival. Here I was able to record several of the devotees exclaim to themselves in between snatches of prayer "We should never do anything to offend *Amman* (Mother)" and "*Amman* (Mother) would take care of us."

It would often emerge during the course of my interviews in India that, the goddesses' power here, was tangibly experienced by her devotees. I recall recording an informant's story that she knew of someone who had come from another part of India and settled in the city of Madurai. This individual had apparently failed to understand the power of the goddess.[5] According to my informant, as a consequence of this irreverence, that person was perpetually visited by misfortune. The informant went on to say that it was only when the individual acknowledged the power of Mīnākṣī and showed deference to her that his long spate of ill luck abated. Although the veracity of this story is something of a moot point, such a recounting underpinned the informant's implicit belief in the part his goddess played in the existential reality of the Madurai community.

---

[4] Kumar, *Hinduism in South Africa*, 88.

[5] I am able to use this festival illustratively because of the goddess Mīnākṣī's connection to goddesses from the folk tradition. For details, see Maheshvari Naidu, "Ritual Space and Ritual Dominance in Nidan," *Journal for the Study of Hinduism*, 2001.

O' Flaherty, referring to goddess in general, points out that although the goddess also brings with her elements of destruction, the devotee does not merely desire to placate the goddess but also wishes to have her never leave him. She claims that "if the essential function of the Goddess is to be there for you, you want her there even when she is in her shadow aspect," and that "the only unbearable harm that the Goddess can inflict on the worshipper is to abandon him or her..."[6] Abandoning the devotee means that the devotee no longer has access to the concentrated power of the deity or to her protection. For the indentured Hindus, in the new and alien land of South Africa, abandonment could quite well be read in religious terms as being catastrophic.

5. The Goddess in South Africa

Rehana Vally says that the crossing of the waters from India was the first part of the immigration process.[7] The second part began upon their arrival in South Africa, being marked by a process of reconstruction of a world that reflected the structures they knew and, would have been familiar with and with which they were comfortable.[8] The imperative here quite understandably appears to have been the need for the familiar. What I would like to further suggest is the need for stability and some sort of reassurance. I suggest that in her bid to re-locate both geographically and psychically and ground herself to some manner of stability the Hindu woman saw it as an imperative for the family to replicate certain ritualistic observances that formed a crucial part of the family worldview in her previous home.

This in itself would not be all that unique to communities that are displaced or dispersed or even female members only of communities that are displaced. There is necessarily a remembering and a homing desire that come into play with these communities.[9] When one looks at the social topography of twentieth century diasporas one sees that reiterative performances of acts that comprise customs or that which is constructed as custom, tradition, or value is sought to be replicated in the new location.[10]

---

[6] Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 280.

[7] Rehana Ebr.-Vally, *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa*, South Africa: Kwela Books, 2001, 21.

[8] Ebr.-Vally, *Kala Pani*, 21.

[9] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996, 197.

What would have been unique to dislocated Hindu communities like the indentured Hindus arriving in South Africa were the religious exigencies of the *period* in which they initially arrived as well as the exigencies of the *places* from which they arrived. These exigencies are revealing in terms of the kind of Hinduism that would require to be re-articulated in a geographical and culturally foreign land. I suggest that two modes of remembering or re-'memoring' operated in the early years of indenture, in other words, from 1860 onwards.

Within the situational reality of where they came from and when they came, emerge two religious imperatives or re-'memoring'. One was a re-telling of the mythological narratives contained in the Hindu texts like the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The other – that is, a strong element of goddess worship and ritual – is more vital for the purposes of our discussion. The particular folk tradition of goddess worship shows up the position and eminence of women as unique and assertively otherwise. My interview with the following respondent clearly underpins this point.

One of my respondents was Mrs. Tholsiama Naidoo in her late sixties who officiated as priestess for the last five years at the Kālī-Amman Temple in Mount Edgecombe. She informed me that the people who attended the temple were drawn from all walks of life and were from all age groups, and that they were both male and female, although the women were in greater numbers.

The temple itself was an exceedingly modest structure both in size and design, which housed several Amman or mother goddesses. My concern was the goddess Māriammen and the adherents who chose to offer worship to her in this Kālī-Amman Temple. Tholsiama Naidoo narrated that the devotees who came to offer worship to the goddess Māriammen, came especially when sickness and misfortune visited them. She pointed out that special offerings of flowers, fruits, etc., were made to the goddess when any member of the family was afflicted with measles and chicken pox. She added that she was asked to invoke the goddess through trance, which she was able to do, although she stated it was easier on some occasions to 'call', as she put it, the trance.

---

[10] Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 197.

She went on to share that the devotees were all in awe of the mother goddess as her powers of healing were unquestioned. "So they come, when they have problems, and no one but mother can help. Mother, indeed, helps them. I have seen it many hundred of times. They will be so sick or so scared of something terrible in their lives and after praying and listening to the trance, and following the advice from the trance, they get better."

One adds that the trance referred to by the priestess is a kind of self-induced hypnotic state where it is understood, within the tradition, that the person under trance is "possessed" by the goddess and uses that body to "communicate" and offer a blessing to cast away the misfortune or illness of the devotee. As such, the female officiating as priestess here is imperative to the relationship between devotee and goddess. These possessed women are revered as the Divine and they are seen as being able to bless others, to act as oracles and are seen as having healing powers. These women are often regarded with great respect by the believers and are sought out as spiritual healers and counsellors.[11]

Interviews with several of the adherents who frequented the temple echoed this almost generic description of why they visited the goddess. True they offered worship to the one god known as Siva or Vishnu but their worship to the goddesses was not seen as any way contradictory to this. However, it was evident from their actions and verbal responses that it was to the female goddesses like Māriammen that the devotees turned to in their times of distress and anxiety with the implicit belief that she would take care of them. Again, vital in this devotee-goddess equation is the position of the mediating person in the form of the female priestess. Many of the devotees that I spoke with said that they consulted with the priestess and asked her to invoke the trance to help them with guidance against their misfortune.

The paper chooses as its foci Hindu women in South Africa and folk goddesses, as they constitute an area obviously under researched, because the position of women is stronger in the context of these folk goddesses. That is to say, it is the women who act as mediators between devotee and goddess. These goddesses 'appear' to communicate through the female priestesses, who are said to be vested with the task of communicating the devotees' particular misfortune to the goddess. It is the priestess who, in turn, communicates to the believer, the goddess' instructions for retribution. The phenomenon of goddess worship, I believe, functions as a hermeneutic device in attempting to unpack just how the Hindu woman's religious identity comes to be articulated in South Africa. For this form of goddess worship, whether it is the goddess Māriammen, goddess Draupadi, or the goddess Kālī, was highly pervasive in the early years of indenture and continues to be so. Diesel notes that the women commented on the close connection between the divine females and human females and saw their close relationship with the goddess as adding and contributing to their own identity and worth as women.[12] One adds that in the absence of the class of formal Brahmin priests (as almost no Brahmin was among the early indentured labourers), the early indentured women could comfortably replay the ritual allegiances to the goddesses, in their role as custodians of the shrine, as they would have in the Indian rural villages. The later arriving Brahmin would have also found himself to be a minority. Hence, there would not have been a stress on emphasising the male deities from the Brahmanical tradition, to the exclusion of folk elements of worship from the matriarchal non-Brahmanical tradition. The indigenous goddess tradition, in turn, demands no preordained priestly class. The priests (female) who officiate can come from any class or caste background. There is, thus, no gender or class barrier, leading to the possibility of a "religion with appeal to the marginalized."[13]

---

[11] Diesel, "The Suffering Mothers," 51.

In turning to minority migrant communities, Hinduism (in South Africa) was studied ethnographically, while Islam and Judaism (in South Africa) were studied historically by Chidchester.[14] While preferring not to engage theoretically why exactly this would be so, he does add that these considerations are important for the historian of religion. I would like to suggest that one possible reason that the Hindu religion, as it appears in South Africa, has been studied ethnographically rather than historically is because of its predominantly visual ritual-based practices performed to the goddesses and gods.

Prior to 1905 there was very little religio-cultural contact with India. This is another reason why I have chosen to focus on the period. The year 1905 saw the commencement of individuals considered to be Hindu religious leaders visit South Africa in a bid to spread and strengthen Hinduism here and stem the tide against conversion to other faiths. These leaders came in the intellectual wake of nineteenth century Hindu reformist thinkers who sought to purge Hindus from what they considered as the overly ritualistic performance orientation of Hinduism and the ambiguity regarding a pluralistic worldview. However, the initial form of Hinduism practised was ritual-based and temple-based worship, one aspect of which was goddess worship. Every temple built in South Africa whether dedicated to the dominant male deity of Shiva or Vishnu had a separate shrine to the goddess.[15] There were also temples dedicated solely to the mother goddess like the Māriammen Temple in Mount Edgecombe whose initial temple structure housing the goddess was constructed in1890.

---

[12] Diesel, "The Suffering Mothers," 52.

[13] Diesel, "The Suffering Mothers," 43.

[14] David Chidchester, "Embracing South Africa, Internationalizing the Study of Religion," *Journal for Study of Religion* 11, 1 (1998), 12.

I suggest that goddess worship was transplanted into the new geographical context for the purposes of ushering in a sense of stability. As such it is a form of communal rather than congregational ritual worship that would see (back in India) the whole village participates to prevent the unfolding of calamities that might otherwise visit the community. As Vally shows us, for indentured communities, travels away from home are also travels away from the organisational principles of certain identity markers such as caste.[16] Vally states that most Indians crossed the waters or ocean fully aware that they stood to lose their caste status. In light of this one can also surmise that observances such as the Māriammen festival and other ritual observances provided a framework for the much-needed 'familiar'.

The women I spoke to were wonderful respondents in their literal responses to questions as to why they still perform this particular worship to the goddess. On an intuitive rather than an intellectual level, they felt that propitiating and offering thanks to the goddess offered a means to sustain stability in their lives and, most importantly, a means of warding off illness and misfortunate precipitated by illness. All women recalled the importance of this particular goddess worship in their family. Their recollections were of the prayer, being a time of family gathering, and indicated a sense of religious group identity, associative solidarity, and cohesion. The goddess is experienced as the mother earth, capable of energies of both life and death. The women interviewed appeared to experience the goddess as an imminent part of their lives.

---

[15] Kumar, *Hinduism in South Africa*, 30.

[16] Ebr.-Vally, *Kala Pani*, 19.

Interestingly, the goddess Māriammen is a natural structure in the form of an earth mound in both the small Kālī-ammen Temple (established in 1925) and the proximate larger Māriammen Temple (established much earlier in 1890). In the latter temple, the Māriammen Temple, the goddess is an impressive size, the earth mound[17] towering close to the high ceiling of the modern temple structure that replaced the original wood and iron temple. Thus, literally, the goddess is of the earth and her form is seen as shaping itself spontaneously from the earth. There was a strong sense of this awareness that presented itself among the devotees interviewed at this temple. Many pointed out that this goddess was special as it manifested spontaneously from the ground and unlike the religious statues in other temples that were fashioned by human agency.

The Māriammen prayer is of special importance to the Hindu woman of South Africa. The men participate as well and are usually, although not always, invested with the task of offering the blood sacrifice to the goddess (in other words, with the actual slaughter). The women are involved with the preparation of the offered food and with the laying of the cooked food in front of the deity. In this instance the food was understood by the respondents as an essential part of the prayer and part of the personality of the goddess. Food is nourishing and in the context of severe monsoon and drought, the exigencies of the climate in India, food is healing and life-giving. In South Africa, it appeared that through the material of food the goddess is construed as also being life-giving.

6. Diasporic Journeying

In discussions of diaspora communities certain so-called movements are thought to come into play. It is claimed of diasporic communities that they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and that they continue to relate personally or vicariously to that homeland.[18] The term diaspora connotes community, numbers, and solidarity. Within this community of numbers comes into play an identity, in this case religious.

---

[17] These are anthills that the indigenous tradition accepts as manifestations of the mother goddess. Small mounds appear naturally, and around it little shrines are erected. This was the foundation of the Māriammen Temple established in 1890. These sites are also claimed as possessing great healing powers. The earth mound is ritually cared for and accepted as a form of the goddess.

[18] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return in Diaspora," *Journal of Transnational Studies* (1996), 10.

This reality is shared with others through common sets of meaning in the various ritual performative acts. But can one just have, or does one need to name, say a religious identity? This may seem like a frivolous question but it is framed against the social realities that inscribe the Hindu identity within India juxtaposed to the discourse operating around Hinduism. For one, the category of Hinduism, and the reality or realities it encodes is very much a nineteenth century creation of colonial imagining, which lends itself to interrogation. The term Hindu is older than the term Hinduism, and had, originally, an ethnographic reference. Hindu as a term is barely used by the people whose religious affiliation the term is meant to describe. The term that the Hindus in India themselves preferred was Sanatanists, meaning followers of the eternal religion.

Of course, the people living outside of India readily accept and use this term. It would appear that clusters of circumstances, political and social, precipitate a heightened identity consciousness, which, in turn, bring certain identity markers to the fore. From the women interviewed it became clear that the ritual remembrances, as in the case of the ritual associated with the goddess worship, and ritual performances acted as assertions of some sort of cohesive identity and collective faith in the goddess' care.

Nelson notes that at the core of all diaspora fictional writing is the haunting presence of India. Brah, however, goes on to iterate that the homing desire is not the same as a desire for homeland.[19] It is not so much diaspora as a theoretical concept, in as much as a particular historical experience of diaspora that I am concerned with, in the context of the Hindu woman's journey to South Africa. The women I spoke with in no way saw India in merely romantic terms or as being their true homeland. It was a place they would have loved to visit or loved visiting. In their own way they were able to express to me that they thought of South Africa as their homeland. This was usually communicated in simple terms stripped threadbare of any kind of talk about diaspora or homeland or intellectual or political jargon. This foregrounds Avtar Brah's assertion that not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return.[20]

---

[19] Emmanuel S. Nelson ed., *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook.* USA: Greenwood Press, 1993; Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 16.

[20] Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 197.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have borne witness to historical events that have seen people whose exodus from their place of home marked by varying degrees of violence and or hope and aspirations.[21] These are narratives of long travel away from original homelands. One suggests that in spite of personal hardship and the extremes of political realities and circumstances, the particulars of which lie outside the parameters of this research, the indentured Hindu women sought courageously to make South Africa her new home. Avtar Brah speaks of the strong notions of diaspora allied with displacement and dislocation. She refers to this dislocation as being journeys across geographical and psychic spaces, and being transmigration across borders of people's cultures marking a space where new forms of belonging are appropriated. If we were to accept this then it is plausible that the Hindu woman attempted to appropriate a sense of belonging in her new homeland, South Africa through certain aspects of goddess worship like the Māriammen prayer and other goddess festivals. The anecdotal evidences from the women spoken to suggest that the mother goddess, with her strong relationship to the earth and fertility coupled with her powers of healing, was sought out in the new homeland.

7. Conclusion

Having sought out the goddess and her protection in an alien land, worship to the goddess as my respondents revealed, has continued up to present. Thus, at the level of popular religious practice, veneration of the indigenous goddesses is of importance to South African Hindus. This paper, however, has attempted to give voice to the early indentured women and the part that they played in the shaping of the early Hindu religion in South Africa.

Contemporary Hinduism in South Africa is itself a testimony to the mosaic character of Hinduism which is anything but monolithic. For the kind of Hinduism presently practised in South Africa is representative of worship to the indigenous mother goddesses as well as a strong emphasis of Neo-Hinduism and the Neo Hindu Movements. Hindus in South Africa follow, according to their inclination, ritual-based Hinduism, or rather a philosophical stream of Hinduism.

---

[21] Rosemary George Marang, "At a Slight Tilt to Reality: Reading Diaspora Literature," *Melus* 2 (1996).

Without question, South Africa is now very much the home of the immigrant Indians; indeed, South Africa is far from being experienced as an alien land. However, ritual-based Hinduism and worship to the indigenous goddesses as well as the various Brahmanic gods continue as testimonies to the significance of religion in the lives of the South African Hindus. Hinduism in South Africa is vibrantly experienced by the local Hindus. The large number of temples as vital sacred spaces is a palpable evidence of Hindus in this country. The structures of the temple and the colourful ritual and festival activities of the Hindus further colour and enrich the multidimensional and multi faith country that is South Africa.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 247-259

AN IRANIAN CULTURAL APPROACH TO MANICHAEAN GNOSTICISM

Abolqasem Esmailpour[◆]

1. Introduction

The cultural origin of Manichaeism was first in Babylonia and Mesopotamia. Mani, although of an Iranian monarchy family, was nurtured in the Gnostic society of Babylonia. He was an expert intellectual and artist who had an undeniable and durable influence on Iranian culture through writing Gnostic works, paintings, calligraphy and tadhib 'book-gilding'). Manichaeism and its religious-gnostic ideas, however, when reached the territory of Persia, naturally took on a Persian tincture. This can be clearly seen through the terms and the nomenclature of Manichaean deities such as Zurwān, Ohrmizdbay, Mihr Yazd, etc.[1] One can see Iranian cultural influence on Manichaeism through its original themes and motifs and also through the functions of the deities. Zoroastrian dualistic doctrine and its impact on the Manichaean approach are undeniable. The specific functions of deities such as Zurwān and Mihr Yazd, and their reflections on Manichaeism are noticeable as well. In other words, the characteristics and functions of Zoroastrian deities match those of the Manichaean deities that were given their names. For instance, Zurwān, according to Iranian and Armenian sources, is a God of Time with an unlimited realm, who is

---

[◆]**Dr. Abolqasem Esmailpour** is Associate Professor at Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran and a visiting fellow in SISU, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, China.

[1] These names, however, are found only in the Middle Iranian *translations* of Mani's works and in the literature that developed among his Iranian followers. The original names and terms were Syriac, and did not include any of these Iranian deities. In addition, Mani himself made the first efforts at applying such names to the Manichaean pantheon in his *Šābuhragān*. For Iranian influence on Manichaean gnosis, see P. O. Skjaervo, "Iranian Elements in Manichaeism" in *Au Carrefour des Religions: Melanges offrets a Philippe Gignoux*, Res Orientales (Bures-sur-Yvette 1995), vol. 7, 236f.

the origin of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, twin gods of Good and Evil.[2] In this way, Ohrmizdbay in Manichaean cosmogony is comparable with Zoroastrian Ohrmazd. The former is the symbol of forgetfulness and gaining knowledge to be redeemed, and he is the first deity to fight with Ahriman, while the latter is the Lord of knowledge and wisdom and is in conflict with Ahriman too.[3]

Mihr Yazd of Manichaean cosmogony, on the other hand, is comparable to Iranian Avestan Mithra to some extent. The former is the saviour of Ohrmizdbay and together with his Five-Sons fights with demonic powers, while one main function of the latter is also fighting with evil power, and we can see the Avestic "verethraghna" (Varahrān or Bahrām), god of war, among his companions.[4] We also see Manichaean cultural representation in Iran during the first centuries of the Islamic period. Although Manichaean religious practice could not be as effective in Iranian religious life during the Islamic era, it had a deep impact on the culture.

2. Historical Context

Gnosticism has vast, multiple, and even universal aspects. Some scholars regard it as a universal religion that once influenced both the western and eastern world,[5] and even now it can be a response to some ideological and cultural quests at the dawn of the third millennium. Manichaeism was also a widespread universal religion in specific periods. It was influential in Iran, Central Asia, India, and China as well as in Mesopotamia, Asia

---

[2] On Zurwan of Zoroastrianism see H. Zahener, *Zurwan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.

[3] G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965, 69-74; G. Widengren, *Cambridge History of Iran* 3, 2; *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sassanian Periods*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 955-990; M. Tardieu, *Le Manicheisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 98-101.

[4] Gershewitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954, 28ff. Also on Mithra in Manichaean Cosmogony, see W. Sundermann, "Manichaean Cosmogony" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, Colombia: Colombia University, 1993, vol. 6, 89-94 and G. Gnoli, "Manichaean and Persian Religions" in *Messina Congress on Gnostic Origins*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966, 123f.; H-Ch. Puech, *Sur le manicheisme et autres essais*, Paris: Flammarion, 1999, 143f.

[5] Of these scholars, Hans Jonas should be noted. See his *Gnostic Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.

Minor, Byzantium, Rome, and even Africa in the west. One of the characteristics of this religion was that wherever it reached, at once it accepted the local religious features and absorbed its cultural elements. This influence was, of course, mutual, i.e., in addition to the absorption of cultural motifs and themes, Manichaean themes themselves also affected the culture and art of every region. Manichaean intellectuals and mystics, in addition to mutual religio-cultural influences, were the best specimens of dialogue among civilizations.

Eastern Europe was a refuge place of the Gnostics and heretics of the Medieval Ages. During the fourth and the fifth centuries, Armenia was a secure region from church cruelties against Gnostics, such as the followers of Marcion and Mani.[6]

Shi'ite Gholāt established different extremist sects who believed "one of Ali's offspring has been gifted divinity. For a long time after his death, they were waiting for his resurrection such as Jesus. Today, their last remnants are the Syrian Nuṣaayriyya or the Alavian. The treatise of *Umm'al-Kitāb* composed at the end of the 2nd century AH (8th century AD), belongs to the Gholāt of Kūfa. It consists of an apocalypse with vivid Gnostic motifs."[7]

3. Universal and Mystical Dimensions

The negation of earthly life and the rejection of body and materiality in the Manichaean-Gnostic attitude are mostly in common with ascetic themes, piety, and rejection of self and sensuality in the Islamic attitude – especially in its Sufistic and mystical approaches. This attitude, in spite of the belief regarding Manichaeism as a religion with pessimistic views, is not so pessimist as it appears at the first glance. The rejection of the world and worldly inferiorities, in the Manichaean viewpoint, is to reach a deeper and more aesthetic world, and it is originally an optimistic attitude. Longing for a pure and an absolute intellectual life is not a wish unshared with the prophets, mystics, and significant intellectuals of every period.

---

[6] J. Petro Culiano, "Gnosticism from Middle Ages to the Present Day" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, vol. 5, New York-London: Macmillan, 1987, 575f.

[7] Culiano, "Gnosticism from Middle Ages to the Present Day," 576. See also M. Desjardins, "Ummal-Kitab" in *Acta Iranica* (Leiden-Teheran-Liege, 1977), vol. 7, 238f.

Gnostic religion has been regarded as a universal phenomenon because it was based on personal specific experience and says that the discovery of truth is possible only through illuminative and apocalyptic wisdom, a religious experience which does not belong to a special theology or philosophy, but designates a free thinking gnosis and attitude. All the gnostics agree that the world is not perfect. Nobody has reached the final redemption through 'worldly affairs'. Hafiz of Shiraz explains the theme with a sigh: "The world and worldly affairs are nonsense // One thousand times have I sought for."[8] In view of Hafiz, nothingness of the world affairs is not pessimistic at all but is essentially a longing for the heavenly, transcendental, and spiritual world. Therefore, this is the right sort of deep optimism in the world of ideology. Manichaean gnosis also does not reject the world through considering 'the world and worldly affairs' as evil, but wishes a heavenly, splendid, and intellectual universe. Since one cannot reach it in this material world, it should be sought in the heavens, where gods, deities, and angels live in a halo of absolute light, which is the right dwelling of the transcendent and gnostic man.

In mystical exegeses of the first centuries after Islam, the term *Nūr al-Azalīyya* (meaning, the Eternal Light) has been frequently discussed. For instance, in an exegesis ascribed to Imām Ja`far Ṣādiq, the interpretation of '*Nūn wa'l-qalam*', we read:

> "Nūn, huwa nūr al-azalīyya, al-ladhi ikhtara`a min al-akwān kulluhā faj`al dhālik li- Muḥammad ṣa'l-Allāhu 'alaih."
>
> "He is the eternal light of which all the beings are originated. So, it was established for Muhammad, Peace be Upon Him."[9]

It is obvious that the 'Eternal Light' is a key figure in Manichaean and Mandaean gnosis. The Realm of Light or Light Paradise is the final redemption. The Eternal Light, in Islamic mystical exegeses, is a fundamental theme that is occasionally mentioned as *nūr-i Muḥammadīyya*' (*Muhammadan Light*). Also in Manichaeism, the Father of Greatness radiates his eternal light and creates divinities such as the Primordial Man who evokes Five Light-Sons.

---

[8] "Jahan-o kar-e jahan jomle hich dar hic hast / hezar bar man in nokte kardeam tahqiq," *Dīvān-i Hāfez*, ed. Qazvīnī-Ghanī, Tehran: Anjoman-e Khoshnevīsān, 1993, 214.

[9] "Exegesis ascribed to Imām Ja`far Ṣādiq" in *Collected Works of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī*, ed. Paul Noya, 2nd ed., Tehran: Iran University Press, 1994, vol. 1, 48.

4. Gnostic Cultural Reflections in Iran

Cultural reflection of Gnosticism in Iran and the Islamic world began at the end of the 3rd century AD after Mani's death. Manichaeans did not withstand the affliction and execution brought by Zoroastrian fanatic clergymen during Bahrām and Shābūhr II reigns and fled to Transoxiana. In the 6th century AD, the eastern branch of Manichaeism led by Mār Šād Ōhrmizd was established, a sect which was known as Dēnāwarīyya. In the 5th century AD, the religion of Mazdak built upon the Manichaean dualism of light and darkness and transformed it into a vast social, religious, and cultural movement in Sassanian Iran. Even before Mazdak, a person named Bundos – who was undoubtedly related to a Gnostic sect – arose and spoke of the conflict of the realms of light and darkness, thought of a social reformation and promised a classless society. Later, in Islamic period, Abū Muslim of Khurāsān was also accused of having esoteric thoughts.

Ismaili gnosis and one of its significant branches, *Zanadiqa* (the Zandiqs), in the 3rd century AD, were founded by˜Abdullāh Khūzi. Later, 'the Fatimid' and 'the Qirmatis' also sprouted as branches of the Ismaili Zandiqs. In the 11th century AD (5th century AH) a sect called 'the Diruzis' (or better Iranian pronounced˜dar*ziyan* = the sewers) originated from them, a sect whose followers are still living in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. In the 12th AD (6th century AH) the sect of '*Malaḥida*', a branch of Ismaili Qirmatis appeared. All these sects had Gnostic ideas. One of the oldest works of the Ismailites, *Kitab al-Kashf* (*the Book of Revelation*) is about creation and cosmology. It describes a kind of mythology with Gnostic-Manichaean features.[10]

Gnostic myths were very likely transmitted to the Gholāt of Shi'ite and the Ismailites via the Mawāli of Iran, a group who converted to Islam during the reign of the Umayyids. They preserved original Iranian customs and traditions. Henceforth, the Islamic world was directly influenced by Manichaeism and Gnostic ideas. These ideas by themselves had cultural reflections as well.[11]

Abū 'Isā Warrāq, Ibn-i Rāvandi, Bashshār ibn-i Burd, Isḥāq ibn-i Khalaf and Ibn-i Sīyabe, most Bamakids, the most significant of them Faḍ ibn-i Barmakī were among Manichaean Zandiqs of Islamic era to whom Ibn-i Nadīm clearly referred in his *al-Fihrist.*[12] Of course, it is noticeable that the Zanādiqa were not exactly Manichaeans, but their esoteric thoughts had Manichaean-Mazdaki features and they hid their pan-Iranistic and nationalistic attitudes behind them. Moreover, being a Zandiq meant by itself opposition to the predominant political system and government.

---

[10] A. Esmailpour, ed. and trans., *Ā'īn-e Gnosī va Mānavī* (*Gnosticism and Manichaeism*), Tehran: Fekr-e Rooz, 1994, 60.

[11] R. Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, New York: Schoken, 1975, 14-20.

Such an attitude can be true also of Ismaili gnosis. Henry Corbin, who has comprehensively researched Ismaili gnosis, believes that "Shi'ite gnosis in general and Ismaili gnosis in particular, cannot be conceived simply as a continuation of ancient gnosis. It follows a path that is purely its own eliminating some themes it assimilates and transforms other perfectly recognizable ones."[13] Therefore, we cannot deny the presence of old gnosis and mysticism in Iranian culture, but its quality and functions should be considered. Iranian Gnosticism is related more with the intellectual elects than the masses. Old mystics called it 'esoteric science' and 'science of truth' that is meant for redemption of the soul. Spiritual birth (*wilāda rūḥānīyya*) is possible in the world of exegesis (*ta'wil*), while bodily birth (*wilāda jismānīyya*) takes place in the world of revelation (*tanzīl*) from heaven. According to Corbin,

> *Tanzīl* is a figurative shape and *Ta'wīl* is a spiritual exegesis. They are two opposed poles. Etymologically *T'wīl* means 'to bring back or lead back to', i.e., to bring literal forms *ẓāhir*, *sharī`a* (appearance, Law) back to the plane of spiritual Truth (*ḥaqīqa*). By this exegesis, Ismailism transforms the literal forms of Koranic Revelation in the same way that the gnosis of antiquity worked with the given forms of Christianity: it performs a transformation of all these forms, events, and persons into symbols. In so doing, it realizes a transmutation of the soul, its resurrection (قیامه 'qiyāmq') – and thereby bears the fundamental feature that relates it to the other forms of gnosis.[14]

The oldest gnostic treatise of the Islamic period, *Umm'al-Kitāb* (*the Mother- Book*) was composed in the 8th century AD (2nd century AH). The author, Abū'al Kaṭṭāb', was one of Imām Ja`far Ṣādiq's devoted disciples. Later, the Ismailites knew themselves as the spiritual offspring of the same

---

[12] Ibn-i Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, Tehran: Air Kabir, 1978, 660.

[13] H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, London: Ḳegan Paul, 1983, 153.

[14] Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 153.

Abū'al Khaṭṭāb regarding him as loyal to His Majesty Ismā`īl, the son of Imām Ja`far Ṣādiq.

5. Mystical Works and Gnostic Motifs

There are some Gnostic motifs, but with different specifications, that can be seen in the religious-mystical works of Islamic period. How they are reflected in the source materials depends on different mystical schools. Gnosticism expressed in *Umm'al-Kitāb* is different from the doctrine described through Ismaili works of the Fatimid period. For instance, the structure of paradise and the celestial essence described in the works of Nāṣir Khusraw is different from the parallel view in Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmāni's works.

Proto-Ismailites emphasized the case of individual redemption and knew their school as the religion of resurrection (*dīn-i qīyāma*), i.e., the resurrection and release of the soul from the material body. This influenced all Iranian Sufistic attitudes. Even the *Mystical Secret* (*sirr-i 'irfāni*) ascribed to Shams-i Tabrīzī, recorded in the *Walad-Nāmeh* composed by Sultān-I Walad, the son of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, has its exact equivalence in the commentary on the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* (*Sermon of Expression*), which Ismaili tradition has attributed to Ḥassan Ṣabbāḥ.[15] On the other hand, *Ismaili 'ḥikma* (philosophy) contains Islamic gnosis. It is a kind of gnosis that, in view of *Ismaili 'ḥukamā* (philosophers), should present spiritual redemption, and it is possible through illumination and epiphany of the soul. The soul's redemption has common points with the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* ("the philosophy of Illumination") of Suhrawardī and the *Ḥikma* ₍philosophy) of Ibn-i Arabi.[16]

The theory of *`uqūl* 'intelligencies' or *malā'ika* (angels) of Avecinna is substituted for "a succession of *syzygies* that correspond to the structure of the major Gnostic systems. From each Intelligence (*'ql*), Nous, or Cherub (*karrūb*) there proceed a soul (*nafs*) that forms a couple with it… The name of the first of these Cherubs, Wajh al-Quds ("the Holy Face") corresponds to that of the first hypostasis (the Monogenes) in *the Excerpta* of Theodotus: the Face of the Father. The *Taṣawwurāt* (Concept) of Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsi preserves the same schema, although there it is complicated by the fact that not only the Intelligence, but also the Soul produces acts of contemplation that gives rise to being."[17]

---

[15] Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 156.

[16] On Suhrawardi's unique attitude of Gnosis see H. Corbin, "Aql-e Sorkh" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 1, ed. E. Yarshater, Colombia: Colombia University, 1993, 87f.

The classes of *Ismaili ukhuwwa* (brethren) and human characters have spiritual and celestial aspects. For instance, *Nāṭiq* or the 'Enunciating' is the Prophet (*Nabī*) or the First Nous (`Aql-i Awwal) and his spiritual successor or *Waṣī* (heir), that establishes the foundation of *Imāmat* (leadership), is the Second Nous (*aql-i thānī*). Henry Corbin believes that the idea that "an earthly person may represent or typify a heavenly hypostasis also occurs in Medieval Latin Gnosticism."[18] The second Nous can be conceived as the World Spirit that, with the First Nous, makes the eternal couple, or Intelligence and Soul. The First Nous is Nāṭiq (Enunciating) and the Second is Ṣāmit (Acute). So, the Soul is not completely perfect and there is the possibility of fall in it.

Sayyed Aḥmad 'Alavī, one of the significant disciples of Mīr Dāmād (11th century AH/17th century AD), found a relationship between old Iranian Zurvanism and this notion that "with the unfolding of the First Intelligence there emerges a shadowy dimension (its aspect of non-being, inasmuch as its being is not necessary in itself), a shadow that goes on growing and intensifying until the tenth and last Intelligence (`ql-i 'āshir). To be sure, this comparison does involve a profound modification of Zurvanism, by delaying somewhat the moment at which the Zurvinite schema makes its appearance (since Zurvan here becomes an angel in the Pleroma, rather than the absolute godhead). Moreover, this is the same transposition that one also finds in the cosmic dramaturgy of Ismailism, and the shift had already taken place in the doctrine of the Zurvanites and the Gayomartians (as that was described by Shahristānī). This transposition must be listed among those characteristics differentiating Ismaili gnosis from dualism in general. Here the crisis that gives birth to Darkness is conceived as situated within the Pleroma – but only so that Darkness may be overcome and can be banished from it, as soon as it has emerged. That is why the Intelligence who will assume the role of the Demiurge in Ismaili gnosis has none of the disquieting traits of an Ialdabaoth, any more that the angels governing the celestial spheres resemble hostile archons. On the contrary, the notion of angelic *tarbīya* or pedagogy (already indicated in the *Mi'rāj-Nāma* [or *the Book of Ascension*] attributed to Avicenna) shows the angels ready to come to the aid of the gnostic in order to help him to 'escape', to return 'home', and carry out his mystical *mir'āj*. Instead, the demonic force is on the earth, where it manifests itself in the implacable battle carried on by the opponents of Imam."[19]

---

[17] Corbin, "*Aql-e Sorkh*," 156-157.

[18] Corbin, "*Aql-e Sorkh*," 157.

The Tenth Nous, or the "active intelligence of philosophers, is seen in Ismailism. In the mystical traditions of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, the personal relationship of this Nous with a mystic and the role of his celestial pedagogy are decisive. The Tenth Nous is the end of a pilgrimage that is described in the *Treatise of Ghurbat al-Gharbīyya* in which some famous themes of Manichaean gnosis can be found: "the young man thrown into the bottom of a well, the Stranger who is reawakened to the awareness of his Self by a letter sent to him by his heavenly family, the stages of the pilgrimage of return, etc."[20]

One of the angels or the mentioned *'uqūls* (Intelligences) in philosophers' words is Jibra'īl (the revelation angel, or the same 'Rūḥ al-Qudus' (the Holy Spirit) in Suhrawardī's words. He was called a human deity. This *'ql* in Ismaili religion, called 'Ādam-i Rūḥānīyya' (the Spiritual Man) is the same Anthropos or the celebrated Primordial Man in different Gnostic schools. According to philosophers' cosmogony, he descends from the third stage to the tenth stage of angels and is the origin of sacred and mythical history. This spiritual man is the same celestial Messiah who has earthly representation.[21]

Abū Ḥatim Rāzī in *'Ālam al-Nubuwwa* (*The World of Prophecy*) and Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī in *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt* (*The Proof of Prophecies*) have presented different gnostic commentaries of *Gospels*, especially *Gospel of Matthew*. They have understood them as the early gnostics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

---

[19] Corbin, "*Aql-e Sorkh*," 158.

[20] "*Risālat al-Ghurbat al-Gharbīyya*" in *Collected Philosophical and Mystic Works of Suhrawardī*, ed. Henry Corbin, Téhéran-Paris: Association de Irano-France, 1977, 274-297; See also H. Corbin, "Aql-e Sorkh," 159; H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shiite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, 2nd ed., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989, 87f.

[21] H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, London: Kegan Paul, 1983, 160-161.

Ibn-i Nadīm asserts in his *al-Fihrist* that the Daiṣānīyya, the followers of Bardaisan, were scattered throughout Khurāsān and China. Bardaisan was one of the gnostics before Mani, who disputed with him only in the quality of amalgamation of light and darkness. The Daiṣānīyya themselves were divided into two sects: one believed that light mixed with darkness voluntarily to refine it, but could not do it; the other sect believed that as soon as light felt the cruelty and stench of darkness, it wished to separate from it, and disputed with it involuntarily.[22]

It is obvious that the Daiṣānīyya were active in the 2nd century AD too. "A fervent disciple of Imām Ja`far Sādiq," as Corbin says, "was a family friend of the Barmecids Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, in contact with all sorts of non-Muslim elements (Bardaisanian Gnostics, Manichaean, Nestorians, and Jews), he was one of the first Shi'ite theologians and a supporter of the nascent Imamology. A good number of Si'ite traditions refer to his authority. That someone so representative of the Shi'ite milieu could have had such connections and could even have served as an intermediary between them and the Imam should give some indication of the ways in which Gnostic ideas and influences were able to penetrate both Shi'ism and Sufism."[23]

The influential paths of Gnostic thought, especially in its mystic dimension, have been spread in Iranian-Islamic culture in general, and in Iranian mysticism in particular. So, the analysis of all its cultural influences and reflections needs a comprehensive research. However, we cannot deal with all Iranian Gnostic aspects here.

6. Artistic Forms and Literary Contributions

Gnostic-Manichaean myths and doctrines have undoubtedly influenced Manichaean art. Originally, the religious-mystical representation of art is one of the significant and vast dimensions of human culture that has been reflected most aesthetically in Manichaeism, especially in the shape of the visual arts. In fact, the relationship of art and mythology has shown its transcendental shape in Manichaean gnosis. Art and myth have been knotted here in an inseparable way. Mani himself was among the artists who tended to painting, calligraphy, and *nibēgān-nigārīh* (a special term of Manichaeans for *tadhhīb* or the art of book painting, gilding, and decorating) in order to promote and preserve his religion. Manichaean art was not really intellectualistic as it was at the service of the doctrine and religion.

---

[22] Ibn-i Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1987, 602-603.

[23] Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 166.

Mani's innovation in his religious-mystical attitude was also represented in his art. It created a new artistic characteristic which is worthy of investigation. The prophet had a volume of illustrations, known as *Ardahang* (Cop. *Eikon*) that illustrated the most important motifs of his teachings. This painting book was even known as '*the Great Men-ho-i*' (*Drawing*) in China.[24]

The most important aesthetical aspect of Manichaean art is also the theme of the human soul's redemption and its reaching the Paradise of Light. The concept of the soul's redemption has been probably illustrated in Manichaean paintings. The release of souls from the earthly world – that was regarded as a mixture of light and darkness – would be considered the most significant theme of Manichaean art. Manichaeism, like other Gnostic schools of thought, wished to flee from the material world and seek salvation beyond it.

The Iranian tradition of *pardeh-khānī* (narrating through pictorial curtains in front of the audience), which continued up to the centuries after Islam in Iran and Central Asia and also it is still a living tradition in Iran by the traditional narrators of the Shahname of Firdowsi, can be originated from Manichaean pictorial traditions. This is clearly described in one of the Manichaean scriptures (M 219).[25]

Each of various Manichaean arts is related to a specific geographical and cultural domain and later spread to other regions. For instance, the art of *nibēgān-nīgārīh* or *tadhhīb* (book-painting and gilding) originates in Jewish and Gnostic artistic traditions of Mesopotamia. Mani himself learned the arts of paintings and calligraphy among these Gnostic sects.

Mani was assumed the inventor of a new script which was called 'Manichaean script'. It originated in Syriac-Estrangelo script with 22 alphabets. Several manuscripts have been preserved in Manichaean or Sogdian scripts. The art of *tadhhīb* and book-painting can also be observed on leather, paper, or silk pieces discovered in Turfan treasuries. On these works Klimkeit writes:

---

[24] G. Haloun and Henning, W. B., "The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light" in *Asia Major*, London: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1952, 209.

[25] M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, Leiden: E. J. Brill / Téhéran-Liège: Biblioteque Pahlavi, 1975, 182.

> The holy books of the Manichaeans, together with their illustrations, reflect an inner attitude determined by constant reference to the World of Light. The inner spark in the human person ultimately belongs to that World of Light, and as everything there is filled with brightness, is orderly arranged, is divine and fragrant, so it is also in pure and well-arranged soul. The beautifully written and embellished page of a handwritten and illustrated book is a mirror of such a soul.[26]

The Manichaean artworks have been affected by Iranian art as the words of Louis Hambis confirm the idea:

> These wall-paintings, which are the only renown Manichaean frescoes survived today, display all the characteristics of Buddhist paintings of Tang dynasty in the oasis of Turfan, and show undoubtedly some effects of later Sassanian art. A specific technique has been applied in the frescoes of Bäzäqliq, but the frescoes of Qočo have been executed upon a surface that are similar to old Buddhist frescoes of this region. The influence of Chinese art has been reflected in some of its general characteristics, such as general colourful motifs of some of the frescoes and the importance of its designs through which the lines have given a kind of splendour and fluency to the configuration… However, it seems that Chinese art was not the effective art in Manichaean wall-paintings, but the influence of Iranian Sassanian art is obvious.[27]

As an example, the influence of Sassanian artistic tradition on Manichaean art can be seen in the Sassanian relief of Tāq-e Bostān. In the relief, one can observe the pearl band which is one of the decorative characteristics of Sassanian art.[28] Such examples reveal the influence of Sassanian art on Manichaean art of Central Asia and the oasis of Turfan. However, since the paintings of Sassanian dynasty have mostly vanished, should we not build on the common aesthetic aspects of Manichaean and Sassanian art based on the surviving Manichaean paintings? This is, of course, only a suggestion. More discoveries of Manichaean artistic works and miniatures and a comparative survey of Sassanian and Manichaean visual arts are needed to prove their close connection.

---

[26] H.-J. Klimkeit, "On the Nature of Manichaean Art" in M. Heuser and H.-J. Klimkeit, *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1988, 288.

[27] L. Hambis, "Manichaean Art" in *The Encyclopaedia of World Art*, vol. 9, 433f.

[28] Hambis, "Manichaean Art," 446.

7. Conclusion

An indication of the continuity of Manichaean Gnostic themes can be seen in some Iranian cultural and literary aspects as discussed above. So, the influence of Manichaean-Gnostic approach in Iran is not deniable. However, as we have seen, the influence was indirect, especially during Sassanian and Islamic era because Manichaean idea of dualism was strictly regarded a dangerous heresy both in the early Christianity[29] and the first centuries after Islam. Therefore, Manichaean gnostics tried to hide their beliefs in the Christian and Islamic coverings during later periods. In this way, we observe their deep impacts on Iranian cultural, mystical, and literary dimensions up to the centuries after Islam. Although the idea of the permeation of Gnostic themes into Islamic mysticism, especially the manner in which these themes permeated through the Christian and Manichaean ascetics, is a new trend in the mystical and literary researches, the continuation of deep, sustained, and steady research might bring about a profound change in the study of mystical texts.

---

[29] On Christian influence upon Manichaeism, see G. Quispel, "Mani: The Apostle of Jesus Christ" in *Manichaean Studies*, vol. 3, ed. L. Cirillo and A. Van Tongerloo, Turnhout: Brepols, 1997, 6f.; E. Rose, *Die manichaische Christologie* (Studies in Oriental Religions 5), Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1979, 194-199.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 261-270

ROLE OF RELIGION TOWARDS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

J. A. Onimhawo◆

1. Introduction

A critical examination of the role of religion in engendering societal peace and development, with particular attention to the Nigerian nation is undertaken to highlight the necessary dimensions of a peaceful religious co-existence. From time immemorial, and from the history of human existence, mankind in every age has encountered a plethora of religious experiences, and therefore, man is prone to further and loftier experiences. When sociologically considered, religion is a complicated cultural state of affairs which is constituted by cult (rituals and worship), a doctrine, and an institutional organisation. The doctrinal aspect of a given religion is equally difficult to determine, for it consists of a complex and extensive system of beliefs, which are developed throughout the ages by generations of believers.

To solve the problem of religious crises and establish peaceful co-existence among the multi-ethnic groups in the Nigerian nation, it is held that religions play an important role. It will be pertinent to begin this discussion with the words of Emile Durkheim, who says: "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practice…, beliefs and practices which unite into one single community all those who adhere to them."[1] In the words of Mike Isokun, "religion promotes cohesion and collective actions among members… [It is] an instrument of social activities, an anti-crime agency and a machinery for social control."[2] Hence, I make an attempt to pay

---

◆**Dr. J. A. ONIMHAWO**, holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion, and is currently working in the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

[1] E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: Macmillan, 1915, 47.

[2] M. I. Isokun, "Religion and Justice: An Enquiry into the Place of Religion in the Nigeria System of Justice," *Epha* (Ekpoma Journal of Religions Studies) 2, 1 (July 1998), 154.

particular attention to the affairs of Nigerian religious reality, with a goal of proposing this as a model for the rest of humankind.

2. The Concept of Religion

Etymologically, the word "religion" is derived from three Latin words: the first word being "*ligare*" which means, "to bind," the second is "*relegare*" which means, "to unite" or "to link," and the third is, "*religio*" which means "relationship."[3] From the etymology of the word (religion), it can be established that religion is essentially a relationship between the supernatural and the natural realms. It is a relationship that exists between a divine entity and a human entity that the human entity believes to exist.[4] The human entity is man, while the divine entity is the Supreme Being who is simply called God in many religions. The God of religion is the God that is conceived differently by different religions. The Supreme Being is the focus of all adherents of religions. The God of religion is the worshipped being, the cosmic power, which is designated by different names in different religions, cultures, beliefs, and languages. The God of religion is conceived by various religions as an anthropomorphic deity.[5] By this, we mean a deity that is conceived in the image and likeness of man, having all human attributes.[6]

Religion, therefore, according to A. C. Bouquet, is a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute, or simply, God.[7]

In Echekwube's definition of religion, religion is considered as a vital encounter with the supernatural or divine being to whom one responds with one's whole being; it is a special experience by man in depending on a superpower for the purpose of a greater realisation of himself.[8] Thus, religion involves a set of beliefs that are enacted through rituals, involving supernatural forces or entities and natural entities or forces with an attempt to influence these forces so as to provide understanding of our existence and the world, and meaning for our actions.[9]

---

[3] J. A. Omoregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion*, Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publications, 1993, 2.

[4] Omeregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion*, 2.

[5] Omoregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion*, 29.

[6] Omeregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion*, 29.

[7] Cited in Omeregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion*, 3.

[8] A. O. Echekwube, *Philosophy of Religion*, Issele-Uku: Martin Industrial Press and Publishing Co., 1984, 36.

Man's many complex life-questions need rational answers, which are believed to be provided only by religion. These include questions such as related to human origin, purpose of life on earth, and the ultimate destiny. Man and the society cannot do without religion. Religion, therefore, is the heart of the society.

Several positions have been developed as regard the origin of religion, especially in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and psychology. While several theories have been advanced as regards the origin of religion, there is no general unanimous view as to the origin of religion.[10] Religion is as old as humankind and the created order. In fact, no one could tell factually as to when and how African Traditional Religion started. It has been the way of life (including cultures, traditions, norms, and values) of the African people from time immemorial – passing on from generation to generation.

3. General Functions of Religion

Religion performs several unique functions both to the society and man. Several functional theories have been advanced by scholars as regards religion. Although Emile Durkheim was not primarily interested in individual phenomena of religious experience, he did recognise the supportive role of religion for the believers because religion gives the believers "the impressions of comfort and dependence."[11] We shall now discuss the overall functions of religion under four headings: supportive, preservative, protective, and prophetic functions.

A. Supportive Function

Human world is full of complex uncertainties coupled with several existential problems. In this regard religion plays a very vital role by providing emotional aids and encouragement to man by way of consolation and reconciliation. When confronted with disappointments religion provides consolation, and when alienated from societal goals, norms, and values, religion provides reconciliation between man and the society.[12] In times of defeats, distress, and impossibilities religion provides emotional support for revival and survival. This is done by establishing values and goals, reinforcing morale, and at the same time, providing immunization against disaffections.[13] Thus, religion supports and encourages growth and maturation of individuals in a society. It provides the ingredients for development, autonomy, and self-direction.

---

[9] Matthew Westra, *Religion and the Supernatural*, New York: HaviLand, 1999, 183.

[10] C. O. Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, Lagos: Associates Publishers, 1998, 183.

[11] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 44-48.

B. Preservative Function

Religion does not only sacralizes the norms and values of society, but also helps to preserve them in an established society. The *dos* and *dont's* in any society are highly controlled by religion in that society. Those things approved by the society are the ones approved by religion, and what the society forbids is also forbidden by their religion.[14] Thus, under its preservative function, social control, order, peace, and stability in the society are attained. Religion not only preserves, it also offers a guide to conduct and right behaviour.[15]

C. Protective Function

Religion being an essential relationship between God and man, offers a transcendental relationship through cults and ceremonies of worship including rituals, thereby providing the emotional ground for a new security and firmer identity through which man finds an escape from his numerous life complexities.[16] Religion provides free access to power especially for the powerless and the marginalized in an unfriendly society.[17] Religion, according to W. Herberg, gives the individuals a sense of identity with the distant past and the limitless future.[18] In periods of rapid social changes, and large scale mobility, the role of religion in providing identity is very important. Religion, therefore, preserves and protects cultures and traditions of the people.

---

[12] J. Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individuals*, New York: Macmillan, 1957, 58-59.

[13] Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individuals*, 58-59.

[14] Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 186.

[15] Westra, *Religion and the Supernatural*, 384.

[16] Westra, *Religion and the Supernatural*, 384.

[17] W. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic and Jew*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955, 120.

[18] Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic and Jew*, 120.

D. Prophetic Function

This function of religion is capable of contradicting the other functions of religion. In a situation where theocracy abounds, certain institutionalised norms and values can be attacked by religion. This is the case of the Hebrew prophets in Biblical history.[19] The prophetic function of religion is often a source of vital social crises in an established society. Religion performs the prophetic roles of salvation and redemption. It provides reassurance. It is religion that provides explanations and explications to life, the created order, man's existence and man's ultimate destiny.

4. The Problem of Religious Exclusivism in Nigeria

Some major religions in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. All of them share the same characteristic of monotheism, yet they disagree in several areas. The most persistent problem confronting religious life in Nigeria today is that of religious exclusiveness – an absolute claim to religious truth by any one religion. Exclusivism is the by-product of religious intolerance. Most guilty of this practice are Christianity and Islam. No religion can claim to posses the whole truth. A religion, which sees itself as absolute, takes other religions to be pseudo-religions, that is, as false religions.[20]

It should however, be noted, that the claim to posses "all the truth" by religions have been a dichotomising factor among the Christian and Islamic religions in Nigeria. They claim to offer the sole way to salvation. As for the Moslems, all non-Moslems are "infidels" and, thus, fighting the "infidels" is considered a holy duty.[21]

5. Religion: Towards Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

Region is a key player in enhancing national peace and welfare of the people. It is obvious that every home in Nigeria belongs to one religion or the other. In some cases, members of the same family may be adherents of different religions. In this sense, religion can play a vital role in enhancing peace and harmony in Nigeria, which is characterised by multi-ethnic groups and traditions. Some of the ways through which religion can contribute to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria are listed below.

---

[19] F. O. Thomas Dea, *Sociology of Religion*, London: SCM, 1952, 15.

[20] W. C. Smith, *Question of Religious Truth*, New York: HaviLand, 1987, 130.

[21] Isiraman and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 203.

A. Religious Tolerance

Despite the fact that the Constitutions of Nigeria[22] provide for religious harmony and peace, religious intolerance still abounds. In many of the cases, the source or root cause of religious intolerance is religious exclusivism.

Most of the religious crises in Nigeria today are based on the unwillingness of religious adherents of divergent beliefs to accommodate the point of view or belief of one another. This has often resulted in religious riots. According to Ray Ekpu, such crises are like "an ill wind that blows, doing no one any good."[23] In March, 1987 there was a religious riot in Kafanchan that erupted between the adherents of Islam and Christianity. In this riot many lives were sacrificed and properties were lost. Post-riot analyses indicated that all these happened as a result of religious intolerance.

For Nigeria to move forward and for the Nigerians to co-exist peacefully, all religions within the nation must understand, embrace, and tolerate one another. That is, the adherents of religions must practise religious inclusiveness, and appreciate and recognise one another in good faith. It should be noted however, that people who fight for their religion are ignorant of even the basic tenets of that religion. In other words, their ignorance or false understanding cannot claim to know God who, in fact, can 'fight' for Himself, if called for.[24]

B. Religious Dialogue

Nigeria as a pluralistic nation is a multi-religious society, and at the same time, characterised by diversity of cultures and traditions that are very complex. The strongest mechanism to be used in achieving religious tolerance, peace, and harmony is dialogue. Dialogue promotes peaceful co-existence. Dialogue is the contact that is established between people of different and sometimes opposed positions who are attempting to overcome their mutual prejudices and broaden as far as possible their areas of mutual agreement whether this takes place on the plain of human relations or that of a quest for the truth or of collaboration to attain ends of practical nature.[25]

---

[22] The 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

[23] R. Ekpu, "Opium of the People," *Newswatch Magazine*, February 24, 1986, 10.

[24] D. Babarinsa, "Fire of Religion," *Newswatch Magazine*, March 30, 1987, 8-12.

The function of religious dialogue cannot be over emphasized. It provides an enabling platform for adherents of divergent religious groups or sects to come together and discuss their problems. In dialogue, every party is considered important, views and opinions are respected and given careful consideration. The ultimate goal of dialogue is peace and harmony. Future religious crises in Nigeria could be averted if Christians and Muslims close ranks by entering into or engaging in mutual dialogue.[26]

The Council for Inter-religious Dialogue established by the Federal Republic of Nigeria should not be given lip-service. This Council should be replicated in all the States and Local Government Areas of the federation. For genuine dialogue to attain its ultimate goal in Nigeria, religious adherents must avoid all provocative utterances, be quick to hear and understand, but must be slow to speak and react. For dialogue to be useful and resourceful in the promotion of national peace and religious harmony in Nigeria, religious stakeholders must practise love and forgiveness since all religions teach and emphasise love.

C. Humanity and Brotherhood

The value of African communalism based on the ethical model of human-centricism must be upheld to the fullest in order to realise peaceful relations among all in Nigeria. The philosophy of communalism is "All for one, one for all, and all for God."

Religion expects and encourages its adherents to help one another. The Africans place great value on humanity. They believe that humanity is a creation of God; all human beings, therefore, are the children of God.[27] In this sense, the Africans believe that all human beings, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations, belong to one universal human family.[28] "Everybody" in the African concept of humanity is related to "everybody else."[29] Muslims should regard Christians as brothers and sisters and *vice versa*. True religious brotherhood transcends ethnic and religious boundaries barriers. Both Christians and Muslims should live the exemplary lives of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, respectively.

---

[25] V. C. Chuwulezie, "Christian–Muslims Dialogue and Philosophy in the African Context," *Nigeria Dialogue* (A Journal of Inter-Faith Studies) 4, 4 (1982), 34.

[26] O. P. Okafor, "Islam and the Survival of Nigeria," *The Torch* 91 (April-July, 1989), 21.

D. Inter-Religious Marriages

Nigeria being a pluralistic society, one powerful instrument that can enhance peaceful co-existence among the people is the instrument of inter-religious and inter-tribal marriages. Marriages contracted between adherents of different religious sects, cutting across ethnic identities, will help to encourage and promote peace and harmony in the society. It will also help to solidify brotherhood and promote understanding. All these will, in turn, promote peaceful co-existence in Negeria. It is heartening to note, that this type of marriage called "mixed marriages," between Catholics and non-Catholics and even non-Christians, is already being practised in the Roman Catholic Church. It should be emulated by other Christian denominations. There are, even, examples of such marriages between Muslims and Catholics.

E. Religious Inclusivism

In a pluralistic religious society like Nigeria, no religion or religious group should claim absoluteness of religious truth. All religions should de-emphasize extreme doctrinal differences and establish common areas of cooperation for the purpose of peace and harmony. All religious adherents should consider one another as important, and see themselves as partners in progress, in a society that has been corrupted with materialism, nepotism, bribery, and corruption.[30] All these can be done without one compromising his or her faith.

---

[27] K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Acra: SCM Publishing Co., 1996, 23-24.

[28] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 26-27.

[29] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 26-27.

[30] Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 215.

F. Government Neutrality

The pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society, coupled with the presence of multiple religious practices, calls for absolute neutrality on the part of the Nigerian government at all levels. In this sense, the government should not use any government machinery to propagate any one religion to the neglect of others.[31] Any religious principle to be incorporated by the government should be beneficial to all religions that exist in the country. If this is done, religious peace and order will be enhanced. Partiality on the part of government in religious affairs, on the contrary, can only lead to the break down of law and order, and widespread loss of lives and properties. It is advisable, therefore, that in religious matters, government should play the role of an impartial umpire.[32]

F. Nigeria as a Secular State

A rigid adherence to the secular character of the Nigerian state is a *sin-qua-non* to the attainment of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. By the provisions of the Nigerian Constitutions of 1999, Nigeria is a secular state,[33] although this provision has been liberally interpreted. Secularity in the Constitutions refers to a situation where, although there may be several religions in the state, none of them is adopted by the state as the official religion.[34] The 1999 Constitutions clarify it as follows: "The government of the Federation or, of a state, shall not adopt any religion as a state religion."[35] Thus, the adoption of *Sharia* (Islamic laws) by some States in Nigeria is no doubt a flagrant contravention of the Nigerian Constitutions. It is, therefore, according to Ejiro's expression, a complete *nullity ab initio*.[36]

---

[31] Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 217.

[32] Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 217.

[33] Section 10, Nigerian Constitutions 1999.

[34] E. G. Adjarhore, "The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and *Sharia*," Ekpoma: LLB Thesis, 2000, 66.

[35] Section 10, Nigerian Constitutions 1999.

[36] Adjarhore, "The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and *Sharia*," 66.

The Nigerian Constitutions recognise the fact that Nigeria is a multi-religious state where all religions are accepted, tolerated, and respected equally.[37] Nigeria as a secular nation must ensure equal tolerance, practice, and possibility of perpetuation of all religions in the state. In April, 1991 one Mallam Ibrahim El-Zakazaky, the national leader of an Islamic group in Katsina, declared in a press conference that he did not recognise the Nigerian Constitutions, but only Islamic laws.[38] Even some of the Muslims who are in support of the *Sharia* operating in some states of Nigeria would agree that the *Sharia* is not conducive to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria which is constitutionally a secular state.

For peace and harmony to be achieved in the Nigerian nation the secularity must be upheld in its totality according to the provisions of the Nigeria Constitutions. *Sharia* or any religious laws should be restricted only to their religious sects, and cannot be legislated to be State Laws, or to replace the Constitutions. Any religious law should have no business in the Nigerian polity.

6. Conclusion

In order to achieve peace and harmony in the Nigerian society, religious tolerance and harmony is a *sine qua non.*[39] This means that religious adherents must use the instrument of dialogue to create an atmosphere of friendship and fellowship with one another. The government must play an impartial role in religious affairs. The values of love, humanity, meekness, prudence, moderation, hospitality, contentment, faith, hope, kindness, patience, etc., which are taught in all religions should be upheld for the peaceful co-existence of all Nigerians.

---

[37] P. Nwabuike, "In God's Name," *The African Guardian*, September 5, 1988, 23.

[38] Nwabuike, "In God's Name," 23.

[39] Isiramen and Donatus, *Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Early Church Controversies*, 218.

Journal of Dharma 30, 2 (April-June 2005), 271-277

Reflection

ADAM: A PSYCHOLOGICAL READING OF THE MYTH OF MAN-MAKING

Ignatius Jesudasan[♦]

We have long been used, in the New Testament and later Christian tradition, to a literalist reading of the myth of Adam as though it were, without doubt, the most reliable pre-history of our common ancestor. This has had disastrous consequences on the spiritual history of generations of literal believers, as Paul Ricoeur points out in his book, *The Symbolism of Evil.*[1] Unaware or unmindful of it, many have held on to the literalist reading of the myth, rather than seeing it as a poetically conceived psychological myth about you and me and every human being here and now and at all times. For a change, I like to explore what meaning the myth makes when looked at from a psychological angle. Depth psychologists have, in fact, interpreted the myth from this perspective, which seems to make a personal sense for everyone, who reflects seriously on the story.[2]

The author therein sees the three created characters in the myth as representing the composite make up of every human being, irrespective of the male-female gender differentiation. Adam represents every Ego or human personality. Eve stands for the instinct, *libido* or the life-and-pleasure principle in every individual. The serpent symbolizes the law of good and evil, or the socializing principle of private and public conscience, which the depth-psychologists name as the Super-Ego.

One must justify such a reading with respectful reference to the text of the hoary myth. Since the myth of Adam is properly contained in Genesis chapters 2 to 4, let us start with that beginning.

[♦] **Ignatius Jesudasan**, a faculty member at Arulkadal, Jesuit regional theologate in Chennai, India, involves in provacative theologizing as a way of unveiling the depths of the Word of God in varied realms with innovative perspectives.

[1] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston: Bacon Press, 1998.

[2] I may refer the reader, for instance, to R. S. Lee, *Freud and Christianity*, New York: Pelican/Penguin Books, 1948.

Genesis 2:7 says that God formed man out of the dust of the earth. The psychologists read this as symbolizing the conception and formation of the foetus in the mother's womb. Since the child breathes only when it comes out of the mother's body, God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life would suggest that, like conception itself, every birth and life-breath involves a divine intervention. Luke's explicit phraseology of the spirit or the power of God "coming upon and overshadowing" Mary, the would-be mother of Jesus, seems in Genesis 2:7 to be implicitly affirmed as a divine presence and action in every case of human conception.

But the moment a child is born and breathes, it has come into a world, which is already divided and organized into a dualistic and contradiction-marked social space and time. This seems fittingly symbolized in the narrative about God planting a garden eastward in Eden and putting there the man whom he had formed (Gen. 2:8). This dualism, contradiction, or mutual opposition will unfold itself as we analyze the symbolism of the rest of the story.

The individual versus society and *vice versa* is the first contradiction or antagonism of organized or community life. Matter and spirit constitute yet another contradiction, implied in the individual-versus-society antagonism, matter-based life, dependent on material needs for growth and survival, is at once desirous and afraid of that life and the means to it. For it is sub-consciously afraid of being denied or deprived of them. Therefore, it seeks to possess the material life and means exclusively of others, whom it sees as real or potential rivals and competitors over against its own survival. The infantile or the materialist life is essentially selfish, un-social and anti-social. To the extent it transcends materiality, it becomes more social and, by the same token, also more spiritual. This is the human maturation for which God has planted the symbolic garden of human society and places every individual in it.

The duality of our desire and fear is rooted in experiential knowledge, which consists of the duality of pleasure and pain. Experientially whatever pleases us is good, and whatever displeases us is bad. We enjoy and desire what we perceive as good and pleasurable, and we fear or dislike what we perceive as pain and evil. Our basic desire or will is for the pleasure of living, with all that it includes or implies. At the same time our experience is also the knowledge of our fear of pain and death as threatening and limiting our desire for the pleasure of a life or a world without end. Even as a society, we desire and seek not only to experience the unmixed good without evil as life without end, and to avoid or escape any admixture of pain and death as evil, but also to understand the reality of pleasure and pain, and life and death through the cosmic law, which seemingly regulates it. Society seeks to build or base individual and social or institutional life in accordance with the cosmic order. This is where and how society evolves and affirms the presence of what we call conscience within every individual and consensus within community or social institution. This is what is symbolized in and by the figure of the serpent in the Adamic myth. It represents the rule of conscience in the individual, and the common law within every society or social institution. But the perennial conflict is between individual conscience and social consensus or law. Thus, the serpent represents the inwardly divided conscientious role of both the individual and the society.

How is this reading justified within the textual plain of the biblical myth? The myth locates the serpent's role in the story as one of inciting the individual libido's appetite for the taste of the symbolically forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition is put into the mouth of God, when He brought the individual He had made to, and placed him in the symbolic garden, which He had planted in Eden. The Garden is just the symbol of a well-ordered and civilized society, governed by laws of common good, which the individual is not to take into his own hands and interpret and apply as it pleases his whim or appetite. This is the textually plausible socio-psychological meaning of the prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The conscience is symbolized in the myth by the serpent, described as the subtlest of all the beasts of the field, which the Lord God had made (Genesis 3: 1). No wonder that it raises all kinds of doubt in the instinctive heart of the libido represented by the character of Eve: Was it really God, who made the prohibition? Or, is it merely a social legislation? This is how subtle a turncoat the individual conscience is, when it suits the satisfaction of its libido. It is fittingly metamorphosed in the metaphor of the serpent with its regular sloughing off of its skin. It is able to hide itself from detection and assault, and revive even after being beaten up or bruised in the head. If God confronts it, it would take cover under its society and its cultural laws and usages. If the society confronts it, it would take cover under God as the witness and guarantor of its individual conscience and consciousness.

Society trains each individual member by allowing certain things at certain times or stages, and denying or forbidding the same things or even other things at other times and places or stages. Society is made up by means of such rules of Dos and Don'ts. "Do good and avoid evil." It is society, which defines for every individual what is good and what is evil, and the individual is not supposed to define good and evil for oneself. This, in fact, is what society traditionally accepts and treats as human maturity and maturation.

But experientially, the social sense or definition of good and evil does not tally with the individual sense and definition of good and evil. The individual feels alienated from society and its norms, and society feels threatened for its order by the dissenting and disobeying individual member. It warns the potential dissenter with threats of the consequences of any contemplated or potential challenging pose and action. This is the symbolism of the permission to eat of all the trees in the garden, and of the prohibition to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Except for setting or changing the ground values of society, the individual is free in all other things. This is what society teaches and dictates to the individual.

The individual, however, feels a division within oneself: How can it be integrated with society and its norms? It senses within its own members a law, which is at war with the laws of the cosmos and of its society. The bodily instinct defies the social norms, which the conscience approves at one time and disapproves at another. Genesis 2:21-22 figures out this division within the individual in terms of two characters, namely Eve and the serpent. As made up by God, from a rib He had drawn from Adam's own body in his sleep, Eve represents the dream-substance and character, which is the element or object of desire for wholeness, within every human being. The rest of the story more than justifies the interpretation of Eve as the libido or pleasure-in-life principle within every one of us.

As pandering to and approving or disapproving of individual instinct at one time, and the social norms at another, the divided conscience is fittingly represented in the myth by the symbolic figure of the serpent, described as more subtle than any other beast the Lord God had made. The conscience is at one and the same time accomplice, approver, and judge, divided by and between the social good and evil, and the individual good and evil. Should it be true and identical to itself or to its society? By what norm should it judge or be judged? Which is the true and correct norm? Judged by the social norm, for acting on the individual norm, individual sin and condemnation for it would abound. Judging society and its norms and conduct by the individual norms of good and evil, social structural sins and rebellion against it would abound. Can the individual not judge society and its norms at all? Is moral judgment wholly unilateral? Is there no respite of true rest and grace period between the two opposing laws of society and of conscience?

In the myth, the individual is judged according to the social norm. Social norms do make individually deviant behaviour both shameful and punishable. This is the moment of the recognition of nakedness at the social exposure or judgment and ridicule, described as the footsteps of God, walking in the cool of the evening (after the heat excitement and passion of the temptation and the succumbing is lowered), and unveiling in the shame of nakedness the loss of rational-legal justice and innocence and of the social esteem and approval associated with it. Fig leaves to cover the nakedness are symbolic of the socially unaccepted or disbelieved explanation, which the individual offers out of his conscience.

Society, like the legal machinery it is, might indeed ride roughshod on individual conscience. God probably would not do so? He would be more compassionate and would lift it up with His right hand? How does He fit in with and into this whole psychological reading of the myth? Is He extrinsically brought in and thrust into the story as a *deus ex machina?* Is He perhaps nothing more than just the symbolic representation of society to justify its laws, or a mystery used and invoked by society and its rulers to legitimize their own will as the will of God?

The threat of death held out in the myth from the mouth of God could not really be from God, but from a society that plays the God game or wearing the God-mask. Even expulsion from the Garden is not an act of God, but an act of society itself excommunicating its disobedient member, by its refusal to forgive or be reconciled to his individual weakness or even defiance. Even the death meant by the God-masking society, as eventually unveiled in the story, is not the literal death of the individual in his/her body, but the death of socio-psychological separation from the native-natural or voluntary society, unless and until the individual undergoes the stipulated penalty or procedure symbolized by the cherub angel with the flaming sword guarding the access to the tree of life in the centre of the social garden. This might mean that the society accepts its recalcitrant member and is reconciled with him/her only if he/she submits his/her life to it and, thus, metaphorically dies at its hands and bosom. In other words, society as a whole claims the undivided status as the Son or representative of God. It would not allow any individual to claim it individually to his or her own self. Jesus, in the New Testament, seems to upset this claim and stakes his individual claim to the status of the Son of God. As involving controversy, the issue is not quite settled, but only asserted and preventively ruled out in the Old, and negated in the New Testament in symbolic favour and on behalf of Jesus of Nazareth.

What then is the integral sense or role of God in the myth in relation to Adam, Eve, the serpent, the Garden, and expulsion from or readmission to it? The integral sense is that God is the creator of every individual human and of all other lives, which He has designed to be also social for their growth, multiplication, and self-defence. The individual human being is not a simple unity, but a complex unity of body with its needs, powers, and passions; the mind, soul, or consciousness which experiences and judges every act and passion as good or bad with or over against the society of which it is a part; and the overall person who is the free agent or subject, responsible for whatever it makes of its life – answerable to both society and to God.

If God willed humans in particular to be social in essence, what is the relation of God to societal laws? Does He legitimize every law? Can He be said to be the author or maker of the laws of the lands: of the Jewish laws, in particular? The author of Genesis 2 and 3 could be said to see it so. Then, again, perhaps not, because he presents the conscientious stand in a more nuanced and ambiguous way in the figure of the more subtle serpent. Societies and persons in positions of social authority could impose and assert their own will as the divine, which is as much as to make themselves divine, which, again, is blasphemous. God, then, is neither the social law nor the legitimizing principle of any and every particular law. He is transcendent to both the individual, with its instinct and its conscience, and to society with its laws and ordinances. He is to be confused neither with the individual conscience nor with the social consensus or organization. He is in and with everything that is, but is also distinct from one and all of it.

By reason of the confusion of God with cosmic and social order, the God in the myth of man-making is also divided between himself and society, on the one hand, and between himself and the individual, on the other. When he condemns Adam, Eve, and the serpent, and expels them from the garden and places a cherub angel to guard the access to the tree of life with a flaming sword in his hand, he is a reflection of the society, with which he is identified. When He clothes Adam and Eve with garments of skin, He is compassionate to the individual person with one's instinct, but still hard on the conscience, symbolized by the last-cursed serpent.

The curses, undoing or diminishing the original blessings of God, weigh heavily on the individual human person, its instinct, and its conscience, pointing to a society and a God who are both divided from within, and stand no less in need of healing and 'at-one-ment' than the individual human being. The Jesus myth or Christology was an attempt to undo or respond to and correct the unsatisfactoriness and disappointment of the tragic myth of Adam. But it was methodologically destined to prove as unsatisfying as the Adamic myth. Adam of the Genesis myth had left his stamp too strongly on Jesus, and rendered him the tragic hero that he became. He had bequeathed the load of his sin to his mythical son, Jesus. Conversely, historical Jesus had taken on himself the original sin of his mythical father, Adam.

Subscription Rates

Annual Subscription:

India	Rs. 140.00
Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka	Rs. 300.00
All Other Countries (Air Mail)	$30.00 or £15.00

Advance Subscription for Three Years:

India	Rs. 360.00
Other Countries (Air Mail)	$80.00 or £41.00

Foundation Subscription (Life Membership):

India	Rs. 5,000.00
Other Countries	$500.0 (or its equivalent)

Single Copy:

India	
Current Issue	Rs. 40.00
Back Issue	Rs. 50.00
Other Countries (Air Mail)	
Current Issue	$10.00 or £5.00
Back Issue	$10.00 or £5.00

Payment is to be made in favour of "**Journal of Dharma, Bangalore**"
and send it addressed to:
The Managing Editor
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram,
560 029 Bangalore, India

Editorial Correspondence:

All Manuscripts for publication should be typed double space with footnote separate (MLA style) and sent in duplicate along with a digital copy to:

The Chief Editor
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: editor@journalofdharma.com
Fax: +91-80-4111 6000

All business correspondence should be addressed to:

Executive Secretary
Journal of Dharma, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: info@journalofdharma.com

Reg. No. R.N. 27399/75 ISSN: 0253-7222

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

An International Quarterly of World Religions

Forthcoming Issues

2005 Vol. 30:

3. Asian Hermeneutics: New Horizons
4. Rationality of Mysticism

2006 Vol. 31:

1. Freedom of Religions
2. Religion and Education
3. Trends in Religious Worship
4. Ecology and Religions

International Indexing: ***Journal of Dharma*** is indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals, Chicago; in Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) and Current Contents/Arts & Humanities (CC/A&B) of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), University City Science Center, Philadelphia, PA 19104; in Philosopher's Index, Philosopher's Information Center, 1616 E. Wooster St., Bowling Green University, OH 43402; in American Theological Library Association - Religion Indexes, 5600 South Woodlawn Ave., Chicago, IL. 60637; in Bowker Serials Bibliographies, 1180 Avenue of the Americas, NY 10036; in Science of Religion published by Root and Branches, Cambridge, England.

Microfilms: University Microfilms International, Michigan. Religious & Theological Abstracts: Myerstown, PA 17067.

Website: www.journalofdharma.com

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, 560 029 Bangalore, India

Printed at
Matha Prints
560 029 Bangalore, India